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## The DEAD DON'T DIE!

By ROBERT BLOCH



COULD A LONE GIRL FIGHT AGAINST  
THE HORROR OF THESE LIVING DEAD?

# MEN BEHIND *fantastic* ADVENTURES



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ROBERT BLOCH and friend

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**Author of: "THE DEAD DON'T DIE!"**

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*(Continued on page 129)*

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- . . . . .

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# The Editor's Notebook

## A CONFIDENTIAL CHAT WITH THE EDITOR

BY THIS time, you've noticed the new packaging of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES—which is responsible for the lighter weight of this magazine, less bulk, clearer illustrations, and more legibility in the body of type. These advantages are all made possible without the sacrifice of a single page of contents. Merely by changing the type of paper formerly used—from novel news to newsprint. We're planning still more advantageous changes in due course, all of which we know will meet with your approval.

THE QUESTION of the actuality of the "flying saucer" again rears up, now that it has been proven that they are mechanically possible. Despite the Navy's announcement of the saucers being meteorological balloon experiments, Dr. E. W. Kay of Glendale, California is one of the firm believers in the existence of the saucers; has even built a 41-inch model of one himself.

THERE ARE eight slotted veins arranged like fan blades in the circular aluminum-magnesium wing. Those open by centrifugal force when the disk spins. There is a motor in the center of the wing which spins the disk and powers the propeller for forward motion. At take-off, the veins open, lifting the disk to the desired altitude. Then the veins close and the disk, still spinning, propels forward.

D. R. KAY is now working on an 18-foot saucer which will carry one passenger. In the larger model, jets will replace the propeller. Dr. Kay has already demonstrated his disk to U.S. Air Force officers. He boastfully claims that his finished 18-foot saucer craft will fly 800 miles per hour.

AND AGAIN in line with flying saucers, Harper & Brothers have just published a book by Gerald Heard called IS ANOTHER WORLD WATCHING? which they listed as a "reasoned appraisal of all evidence available proving the existence of flying saucers".

LOOKS LIKE the riddle of the flying saucer will get much deeper before it is finally explained. As of today, here are the pertinent facts regarding this all-engrossing mystery: (1) these craft have been used by trained observers; (2) in December of 1949, the Air Force dismissed all reports of this strange scientific phenomenon as a mass delusion; (3) just recently, in February of 1951, the Office of Naval Research did admit that these disks had been observed, but stated that they were just balloon experiments. Although to us this would appear to increase the puzzle of this strangest of scientific facts, since pilots have seen these disks flying against the wind at speeds greater than that of sound, which for balloons would be impossible.

IN THE June issue of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES, we published a beautiful short-story by Bill McGivern titled "Conditioned Reflex". In this little story, Bill brought out how man will ultimately succeed in destroying himself through his own arrogance and stupidity. Two days after the issue appeared, Paul Fairman walked into our office and deposited a thin envelope in our hands. "Bill's a good writer," said Paul, "and I always enjoy just about everything he has to say. But his story in the June FA I do not like! I do not like his pessimistic attitude—a doomed Mankind. In fact, I resent it. And here's my answer to Bill..." (See page 88—"Witness for the Defense"—and let us know with whom you agree. Is humanity doomed to its own destruction—or do you believe, like Paul, that civilization will rise to ever greater heights?) —LES



"We use him for air mail!"

# BEYOND THE VEIL . . .

By  
John Weston

A FASCINATING question has been brought up by a number of thinkers both here and in Britain. It really is not a new question, but its re-formulation causes one to lean back and speculate on the mystery of things. The question is: "Do our senses, the scientific extensions of our senses, and our thinking minds, reveal to us all of the universe that is?"

We know that the first two portions of that question can be answered—no, they do not. Our coarse, gross senses—sight hearing, etc., for example, do not tell us anything about the existence of electricity or magnetism. The mechanical extensions of our senses are required to inform our minds of these things. The second part of the question is being answered in many scientific experiments. The answer is also "no", for finality is never found. As we probed the electromagnetic spectrum and kernel of the atom we discovered strange relationships wholly contrary to our previous beliefs. These scientific extensions of our senses, while revealing an infinite variety of phenomena, only point up our basic ignorance.

Our minds, of course, particularly in mathematics and philosophy are powerful probing tools, continually turning up strange aspects of the cosmos. The serious psychic researches of men in Rhine's laboratory at Duke University and other places tend to lead us to suspect that there are worlds about whose existence we can only speculate. The net result of this thinking is to make us believe that there are many things indeed which we do not know.

Now what about this unknown portion of the cosmos? The answer is naturally—nothing. Here we cannot even speculate with any degree of soundness at all. All we can do is recognize that perhaps, in spite of all our glorious advances in theoretical and applied science, we are uncovering only the most obvious aspects of a universe too infinitely complicated for us to imagine what it is really like. It is like knowing the protruding portion of an iceberg and not understanding that seven-eighths of the object is submersed!

This is not to say that we must go hog wild and disregard the evidences of our senses. Not at all. In fact, more than ever, we must re-evaluate them, trying to discern every possible thing they can tell us. We must concede with Hamlet, "...there are more things betwixt Heaven and Earth than are dreamt of..."

# THE MOON? MAYBE . .

By  
Charles Recour

IT IS at once disheartening—and yet suggestive—this close-mouthed attitude on the part of the government concerning rocketry. The official releases of the Air Force and Navy groups responsible for the development of rockets are usually filled with platitudes and unimportant trivia, though these are played up with a grand gesture. Records of altitudes, a few skimpy photographs, a newsreel release of a V-2 flight—these are the things fed the public. But never, never is the subject of space-flight mentioned. All such references are evaded as if talking about a Moon-rocket was taboo. Could there be a subtle reason for this? Is it possible that a Moon flight may already be a *fait accompli*?

That's laying it on a bit thick, admittedly, but the deliberate evasion of even speculation on the part of those charged with the research work on rockets leads one to believe that more along this line may have been accomplished than has been admitted. Perhaps even now the first Lunar projectile is scheduled!

Realizing that the major aim of military rocketry is to develop guided missiles, we still, as a by-product of this research, must do a good deal of work on space-flying. It is not possible to study one thing without getting ideas about the other. What is so damnably maddening about the whole thing is the realization that the accomplishment is within grasp. It is only a matter of economics really, and it seems a crying shame that we can't summon up enough money in our resourceful country to get a projectile into space. You'd think it could be done on enthusiasm alone.

Some have advanced the idea that the government is deliberately keeping quiet on its accomplishments in rocketry because they are so startling and the Soviets might be alarmed into aggressive acts by the revelation. This seems rather thin, though. With the host of experts using German rocketry as a starting point, surely in the last five years we must have gone a long way toward licking the many problems facing would-be spacemen. The question is—when will we know about these things?

Recently the information was disclosed that a fairly long-range guided missile had been developed, one which could carry an atomic warhead. If things have gone so far, surely the next step—the Lunar rocket—can't be too far away. We hope sincerely that the boys get going—the suspense of waiting for a rocket—any kind of a rocket (even an old beer bottle)—to land on Luna is killing us!



# THE DEAD DON'T DIE!

*By Robert Bloch*





**Just because that lovely girl smiled at you, does that mean she's alive? Better take another look—she may be a walking corpse named Vera LaValle . . .**



**T**HIS IS a story that never ends. This is a story that never ends, but I know when it started. Thursday, May 24th, was the date. That night was the beginning of everything for me.

For Cono Colluri it was the end. Cono and I were sitting there, playing two-handed stud poker. It was quiet in his cell, and we played slowly, meditatively. Everything would have been all right except for one

thing. We had a kibitzer.

No matter how calmly we played, no matter how unemotional we appeared to be, we both were aware of another presence. The other, the kibitzer, stayed with us all night long.

His name was Death.

He grinned over Cono's shoulder, tapped him on the arm with a bony finger, selected the cards for every shuffle. He tugged at my hands, poked me in the back when I dealt.

We couldn't see him, of course. But we knew he was there, all right. Watching, watching and waiting; those big blind holes in the skull sneaking a look at the clock and counting the minutes, those skeleton fingers tapping away the seconds until dawn.

Because in the morning, no matter what cards turned up and no matter how much money changed hands, Death would win the game. The game, and Cono Colluri.

It's funny, looking back on it now, to figure out how the three of us happened to get together that particular evening—Cono, myself, and Death.

My story's straight enough. About six months beforehand I'd taken a Civil Service exam and ended up for a probationary period as a guard at State Pen. I wasn't too excited about the job when I got it, but I felt it might give me routine, a small but steady income, and a chance to turn out a book on the side. By the time a few months had passed, I knew I was wrong. The idea of turning out a novel in a background of security sounded fine when I started, but there was no security in a guard's life. I found I couldn't write. The bars and the concrete penned me in just as much as any of my charges. And I began to develop my own sense of guilt.

I guess my trouble was too much empathy. That's a big word—mean-

ing the ability to put yourself in the other fellow's place. "There but for the grace of God go I"—you know that feeling. I had it, but double. Instead of writing at night, I tossed around on my bunk and suffered the torments of the thousand men under my charge.

That's how I got friendly with Cono, I guess—through empathy.

Cono came to the death cell in an awful hurry. His had been a short trial and a merry one—the kind of thing the newspapers like to play up as an example of "quick justice". He'd been a professional strong man with a carnival—the James T. Armstrong Shows. The story was that he got too jealous of his wife and one of the other performers. At any rate, one morning they found Cono lying dead drunk in his trailer. His wife was with him, but she wasn't drunk—merely dead. Somebody had pressed two thumbs against the base of her neck, and something had snapped.

It was an ideal setup for "quick justice" and that's just what Cono Colluri got. Within three weeks he was on his way to the death-house, and for the past two weeks he'd been a guest of the state. A temporary guest. And he was moving out tomorrow morning—for good.

THAT, OF course, explains why Death showed up at our little card party. He belonged there.

Oh, perhaps not for the entire night. He undoubtedly had rattled down the short—oh so terribly short!—corridor to the little room with the big chair. He'd probably peered and eavesdropped on the electricians who tested the switches. He'd certainly have stopped in at the warden's office to make sure that the mythical pardon from the Governor wasn't on its way.

Yes, Death must have checked all those things to make certain that this

was really a farewell card party. And now the uninvited guest was kibitzing as Cono and I dealt our hands.

I knew he was there, and Cono knew it too, but I have to hand it to the big man. He was cool. He'd always been cool; on the stand, swearing his innocence, he'd never lost his temper. Here in the cell, talking to the warden, to the other guards, to me, he'd never broken down. Just told his story over and over again. Somebody had slipped a Mickey in his drink and when he woke up, Flo was dead. He'd never harmed her.

Of course, nobody believed him at the trial. Nobody believed him in the prison, either; the warden, the guards, even the other convicts knew that he was guilty and ready to fry.

That's why I had the honor of spending the last night with him—he'd made a special request for my presence. Because, believe it or not, I believed him.

Blame it on empathy again, or on the very fact that I noticed he never lost his temper. The way he talked about the case, the way he talked about his wife, the way he talked about the execution—everything was out of character for a "crime of passion" murderer. Oh, he was a big brute, and a rough-looking one, but he never acted on impulse.

I guess he took to me right away. We used to talk, nights, after I drew guard assignment on his bloc. He was the only prisoner awaiting execution, and it was natural that we'd get to talking.

"You know I didn't do it, Bob," he'd tell me—over and over again, but there was nothing else to talk about, for him—"It must have been Louie. He lied at the trial, you know. He had been drinking with me, no matter what he says, and he offered me a slug out of the bottle behind the cookhouse, after the last show. That's the last

thing I remember. So I figure he must have done it. He was always hanging around Flo anyway, the little crumb. The Great Ahmed warned me, said he saw it in the crystal. But of course, he came into court with this alibi and—oh what's the use?"

There was no use at all, and he knew it. But he told me over and over again. And I believed him.

NOW, THIS last night, he wasn't talking. Maybe it was because Death was there, listening to every word. Maybe it was because they'd shaved his head and slit his trouser legs and left him to wait out these last few hours.

Cono wasn't talking, but he could still grin. He could and he did—smiling at me and looking like a great big overgrown college boy with a crew haircut. Come to think of it, he wasn't much more than just that; only Cono had never gone to college. He went with his first carney at fifteen, married Flo when he was twenty-three, and now he was going to the chair two days before his twenty-fifth birthday. But he smiled. Smiled, and played poker.

"My king is high," he said. "Bet a quarter."

"See you," I answered. "Let's have another card."

"King still high. Check. Funny thing, aces aren't coming up much tonight."

I didn't answer him. I didn't have the heart to tell him that I was cheating. I'd taken the Ace of Spades out of the pack and put it in my pocket before the game started. I didn't want him to get that particular card on the table tonight of all nights.

"Fifty cents on the king," said Cono.

"See you," I said. "I've got a pair of nines."

"Pair of kings." He turned up his

cards. "I win."

"You're just naturally lucky," I told him—and wished I hadn't.

But he smiled. I couldn't face that smile, so I looked at my watch. That was another mistake, and I realized it as soon as I made the gesture.

His smile didn't alter. "Not much time left, is there?" he said. "Seems to be getting light."

"Another hand?" I suggested.

"No." Cono stood up. Shaved head, slit trousers and all, he was still an impressive sight. Six feet four, two hundred and ten pounds, in the prime of life. And in just an hour or so they would strap him into the chair, turn on the juice, twist that smile into a grimace of agony. I couldn't look at him, thinking those thoughts. But I could feel Death looking; gazing and gloating.

"Bob, I want to talk to you."

"Shall we order breakfast? You know what the warden said—anything you want, the works."

"No breakfast." Cono put his hand on my shoulder. The fingers that were supposed to have broken a woman's neck barely pressed my skin. "Let's fool 'em all and skip the meal. That'll give the nosey reporters something to talk about."

"What's up?"

"Nothing much. But I got things to tell you."

"Why me in particular?"

"Who else is there left? I got no friends. Got no family I know of. And Flo's gone...."

**F**OR THE first time I saw a look of anger flicker across the big man's face. I knew then that whoever had killed Flo was lucky when Cono got the chair.

"So it has to be you. Besides, you believe me."

"Go on," I said.

"It's about the dough, see? Flo and

me, we were saving for a house. Got better'n eight grand stashed away. Somebody's gonna get it, so why not you? I wrote this here letter, and I want you to have it."

He pulled the envelope out from under his bunk. It was sealed, and scrawled across its face in the sprawling handwriting of a schoolboy was the name, "The Great Ahmed".

"Who's he?"

"I told you, he's the mitt reader with the carney. A nice guy, Bob. You'll like him. He stuck up for me at the trial, remember? Told about Louie hanging around Flo. Didn't do any good because he couldn't prove nothing, but he was—what did the lawyer say?—a character witness. Yeah. Anyhow, he banks for all us carneys with the show.

"Take the letter. It says to give you the money. He'll do it, too. All you got to do is look him up."

I hesitated. "Wait a minute, Cono. You'd better think this over. Eight thousand dollars is a lot of money to pass out to a virtual stranger—"

"Take it, pal." Again he smiled. "There's a string tied to the bundle, of course."

"What do you want?"

"I want you to use some of that dough to try and clear me. Oh, I know you haven't got much of a chance, and nothing to work on. But maybe, with the dough, you'll get an angle, turn something up. You're leaving this joint anyway."

I jerked my head at that. "How did you know?" I asked. "Why, I only told the warden yesterday afternoon—"

"Word goes around," Cono smiled. "They give me the office that you're springing yourself out of here this Saturday. That you aren't satisfied to be a screw the rest of your life. So I says to myself, why not give him the eight grand as a kind of going-away

present? Seeing as how we're both going away."

I BALANCED the envelope on my palm. "The Great Ahmed, eh? And you say he's with the show?"

"Sure. You'll find their route in *Billboard*." Cono smiled. "They must be somewhere around Louisville right now. Heading north as it gets warmer. I'd sort of like to see the old outfit again, but..."

The smile faded. "One more favor, Bob."

"Name it."

"Scram out of here."

"But—"

"You heard me. Scram. I expect visitors pretty soon, and I don't want you to stick around."

I nodded, nodded gratefully. Cono was sparing me that final ordeal—the warden, the priest, the mumbling farewell, the shuffling down the corridor.

"Goodbye, Bob. Remember, I'm depending on you."

"I'll do what I can. Goodbye, Cono."

The big hand enveloped mine. "I'll be seeing you around," he said.

"Sure."

"I mean it, Bob. You don't believe this is the end, do you?"

"Maybe you're right. I hope so." I had no intention of getting into a discussion about the after-life with Cono, in his situation. Personally, I had a pretty good idea that once the juice was turned on, Cono would be turned off—forever. But I couldn't tell him that. So I just shook hands, put the letter in my pocket, unlocked the cell, and walked out.

At the end of the corridor I turned around and looked back. Cono stood against the bars, his body outlined against the yellow light but blending into the shadows that come with dawn. There was another shadow behind him—a big, black shadow out-

lining a ghost of a figure.

I recognized the shadow. Old Man Death.

That was the last I saw—just the two of them, waiting together. Cono and Old Man Death.

I went downstairs, then, to my bunk. The night shift came off and the day shift went on. They were all talking about the execution. They tried to pump me, but I didn't say anything. I sat there on the edge of the bunk, looking at my watch and waiting.

UPSTAIRS they must have gone through the whole routine, just the way you always see it in the B movies. Opening the door. Handcuffing him to a guard on either side. Marching down the corridor. Yes, just about now it would be happening. The night shift went outside to get the news, leaving me alone on my bunk. I looked at my watch again. Now was the time.

They'd be strapping him down now, putting that damned black cloth over his eyes. I could see him sitting there; a big, gentle hulk of a man with a tired smile on his face.

Maybe he was guilty, maybe he was innocent—I didn't know. But the whole stupid business of execution, of "justice" and "punishment" and "the full penalty of the law" hit me in the pit of the stomach. It was cruel, it was senseless, it was wrong.

The seconds ticked away. I watched the little hand crawl around the face of the watch and tried to figure it out. One minute Cono would be alive. A jolt of electric current and he'd be dead. Trite idea. But it's the eternal mystery all of us live with. And die with.

What was the answer? I didn't know. Nobody knew. Nobody except the kibitzer. Old Man Death knew the answer. I wondered if he had a

watch. No, why should he? What's Time to Death?

*Thirty seconds.*

Sure, I'd quit my job. I'd try to clear Cono. But what good would it do him? He'd never know. He'd be dead.

*Twenty seconds.*

The hand crawled around, and the thoughts crawled around. What's it like to be dead? Is it a sleep? Is it a sleep with dreams? Is it just dreams but no rest, no peace?

*Ten seconds.*

One moment you're alive, you can feel and hear and smell and see and move. And the next—nothing. Or—something. What's the change like? Like suddenly turning out the lights?

*Now.*

The lights went out.

First they dimmed, then they flickered, then they went out. Only for a second, mind you. But that was long enough.

Long enough for Cono to die.

Long enough for me to shudder.

Long enough for Death to reach out, grinning, and claim his prey in the dark...

**I** WAS STILL in a daze when I hit the railroad station on Saturday morning. So much had happened in the last two days I still couldn't figure it out.

First of all, there was that business about Cono's body. I'd gone to the warden, of course, with the story about the money, and I more or less expected to handle funeral expenses from Cono's funds when I got them.

"His cousin will bury him," the warden told me. "Got a call this morning."

"But I thought he had no relatives."

"Turns out he has, all right. Fellow named Varek. Oh, it's legitimate, we always check. The Doc insists—

makes him mad every time somebody shows up and cheats him out of an autopsy."

The warden had chuckled, but I didn't laugh.

And the warden hadn't chuckled long. Because the next day, Louie had confessed.

Louie the contortionist, that is—the man Cono claimed had given him the knockout drops in his drink. The warden got a wire, of course, but the whole story hit the papers that afternoon. It seems he'd just walked into the station-house in Louisville and confessed. Came out with the entire statement without a sign of emotion. Said he just wanted to clear his conscience once he knew Cono was dead. He'd hated Cono, wanted Flo, and when she repulsed him he rigged up the murder to get revenge on both of them.

The story was lurid enough, but it had gaps in it. The report I read claimed Louie was a hophead. He was too calm, too unemotional. "Glassy-eyed" was the way they put it. They were going to give him a psychiatric test.

Well, I wished them luck, the whole lot of them—psychiatrists and district attorneys and smart coppers and penologists. All I knew was that Cono was innocent. And he was dead.

By this time I'd already checked on the Armstrong Shows through *Billboard*. They were playing Louisville this week, all right. I sent through my wire Friday afternoon. Saturday morning I got a telegram signed by the advance agent in Paducah.

GREAT AHMED LEFT  
SHOW THREE WEEKS  
AGO STOP OPENING OWN  
MITT CAMP IN CHICAGO  
STOP WILL CHECK FORWARDING  
ADDRESS AND

## NOTIFY LATER"

So I was on my way to Chicago and eight thousand dollars. I'd hole up in some hotel and wait for news on the Great Ahmed. And after that—well, with the money, my writing problems would be solved.

**A**CTUALLY, I should have been happy enough at the way it had all turned out. Cono's name was cleared, I was out of the whole sordid grind forever, and I had eight grand coming, in cash.

But something bothered me. It wasn't just the irony of Cono Colluri's innocence. It was the inexplicable feeling that things weren't settled, that they were only beginning. That I had somehow been caught up in something that would sweep me along to—

"Chicago!" bawled the conductor.

And there I was, in the Windy City at 5 PM on Saturday, May 25th. It wasn't windy today. As I lugged my grip out of the LaSalle Street Station I walked straight into a pouring rain.

There's something about a storm in Chicago. It seems to melt all the taxicabs away. I stood there, contemplating the downpour, watching the cars inch along under the El tracks. The sky was dark and dirty. The water dribbled inkstains along the sides of the buildings. I couldn't stand watching it in my present mood.

So I walked. I turned corners several times. Pretty soon there was a hotel. It wasn't a good hotel. It was located too far south to be even a decent hotel. But that didn't matter. I needed a place to stay in for a couple of days until the money was located. And right now, I had to get out of the rain. My suit was soaked, and the cardboard in the luggage had taken a beating.

I went in, registered. A bellboy took me up to my room on the third floor.

Apparently he hadn't expected me. At least, he didn't know about my coming in time to shave. But he opened my door, deposited my luggage and asked if there'd be anything else now. Then he held out his hand. It would have taken me all day to give him a decent manicure, so I put a quarter in his palm instead. He was just as happy with that.

Then he left, I opened my grip, changed clothes, and went out to eat. The rain had moderated to a drizzle. I stopped in the lobby long enough to get eyed by the night clerk, the house dick, and a woman with improbable red hair.

During the pause I managed to send off a telegram to the advance man of the carney, giving him my new address and requesting action on locating the Great Ahmed. That concluded my business for the day.

At least, I thought it did at the time.

Nothing happened to change my mind during supper. I ate at a fish joint and contemplated the delightful prospect of returning to my crummy room and holing up for the week-end.

**I** DON'T know if you've ever spent a Sunday alone in downtown Chicago, but if you haven't, I offer you one word of advice.

Don't.

There's something about the deserted canyons on a Sunday that tears the heart out of a man. Something about the gray sunlight reflected from grimy roofs. Something about the crumpled bits of soiled paper flopping listlessly along empty streets. Something about the mournful rattle of the half-empty elevated trains. Something about the barred shop-windows and chained doors. It gets to you, does things to your insides. You start wondering whether



or not, in the midst of all this death and decay, you're really alive.

The prospect didn't please me at all. I finished my meal, put another quarter in another palm, and wandered out down the street.

After all, it was still Saturday night. And Saturday night was different. The rain had definitely stopped now, and the street was black and gleaming. Neon light reflections wriggled like crimson and gold serpents across my path.

You know what serpents do, of course. They tempt you. These particular neon serpents were saying, "Come in. Have a drink. You've got nothing to do tonight anyway, and nobody to do it with. Sit down. Place your order. Relax. You're due for a little relaxation after six months in prison. It's a long sentence. You know what a con does after he's sprung. You're entitled to a little fun."

There were serpents all around me. Serpents spelling out the names of taverns, night-clubs, come-on joints, clips, dives. All I had to do was take my choice.

Instead, I walked back to the hotel, went in the lobby, and checked with the night clerk to make sure my telegram was really on the way to the carney. Then I went up to my room and rid myself of all money except for a ten-dollar bill. I wasn't taking any chances on getting rolled.

The night was still young. I'd probably feel young myself with a few drinks in me. I went back down to the lobby and toyed with the notion of the hotel bar.

The improbable redhead had disappeared, and so had the house dick. The place was almost deserted now. Almost, but not quite. There was a blonde sitting in a chair near the elevator. I'd looked at her once when I'd come downstairs and now I looked at her again.

She was worth a second look.

Genuine. That's the only word to describe her. Genuine. To begin with, she was a real blonde. No peroxide glint, no unnatural accent in makeup. The fur she wore was real, and so were the diamonds.

Those diamonds really stopped me. The ring was too big to be phoney. Even if the stone were flawed, it must have set her (or somebody) back a pretty penny. And the same went for the big choker that clung to her neck in a glittering caress.

Her smile seemed genuine, too.

And that was the phoney part.

Why should she smile at me? Me, with my forty-dollar suit and my ten-dollar bill tucked away in its watch pocket?

I didn't get it. And I didn't want it. I walked towards the lobby entrance to the hotel bar. She stood up and followed.

I walked into the dimly-lit bar, around it, and out the front door to the street. I'd do my drinking somewhere else, thank you.

**T**HERE WAS a little place across the street down the block. I ran into it, crossing in mid-traffic. Before I opened the door I glanced back to make sure that she wasn't following. Then I went in.

The joint was small—an oval bar and five or six booths grouped on either side of a juke-box. The bartender on duty was lonesome.

"What'll it be, Mac?"

"Rye. Top shelf."

He poured. I drank. Just like that. Fast. The stuff was bonded, like a bank messenger.

"Refill, please."

He poured. I watched his black bowtie. It was beginning to wobble in anticipation of the conversation forming in his larynx. Abruptly it stopped wobbling.

Because the door opened and she came in. Big as life, and even blonder. The neon on the juke-box did things to her diamond choker.

There was no place to hide. No real reason for me to hide, for that matter. She came right over, sat down, motioned to the bartender. "The same," she said. Nice, rich, husky voice.

She watched the man pour, then transferred her gaze to me. Her eyes matched the diamonds she was wearing.

"Let's sit in a booth," she suggested.

"Why?"

"We can talk there."

"What's wrong with right here?"

"If you prefer."

"What's the proposition?"

"I want you to come with me, to meet somebody."

"You'll have to talk plainer than that, lady."

"I said we should take a booth."

"Nothing wrong with mentioning names right here in the open."

"No." She shook her head. Those diamonds shed enough light to blind a pedestrian walking across the street. "I am not permitted to mention names yet. But it will be to your advantage to come with me."

"Sorry, lady. I'd have to know more about it." I looked down at my glass. "For example, who sent you to me. How you found me. Little details like that. Maybe they're nothing to you. Me, I find them fascinating."

"This is no time to make jokes."

"I'm serious. And I say I'm not playing unless you tell me the name of the team."

"All right, Bob. But—"

That did it. The name. Of course, she could have picked it up off the hotel register easily enough. But it jarred me more than anything else up to that point. It jarred me right on

down to my feet.

"Good-night," I said.

She didn't answer. As I walked out, she was still staring at me. Blue diamond eyes winked me out of the tavern.

I walked out. I didn't go back to my room and I didn't go to another tavern. I headed north, crossed under the El tracks into the Loop. There was a burlesque show. I bought a ticket and sat through a dreary performance of which I remember nothing except the old blackout skit about the photographer in the park who complained that the squirrels were nibbling his equipment.

I spent my time trying to fit the pieces together. Who was this girl? A friend of Cono's? A friend of Flo's? A friend of the Great Ahmed's? A friend of the carney advance man? Or just a friend?

Cono was dead and Flo was dead. They couldn't tell her where to find me. Ahmed didn't know I existed, let alone where I was. The carney advance man wouldn't know my address until the telegram arrived.

Could it be that she had a line into the prison and had learned I was about to receive eight thousand dollars?

Was she simply working the hotel, picking my name from the register at random?

But if so, what was this story about a proposition, and meeting somebody?

It didn't make sense. I sat there a while and tried to figure the deal out, then I left.

**E**LEVEN O'CLOCK. I headed back to the hotel. This time I peeked into the lobby before entering. She wasn't around. I slid unobtrusively past the entrance so the night clerk wouldn't pay attention. He was reading a science-fiction magazine and didn't look up.

The elevator operator took me to the fifth floor without removing his eyes from the Racing Form. Quite a bunch of students in this hotel. Probably working their way through mortician's school.

I walked down to the door of my room very quietly. I listened at the keyhole before I unlocked the door. Then I opened it fast and switched on the light.

No blonde.

I examined the closet, the wash-room. Still no blonde. Then and only then I went to the phone, called room service, and ordered a pint of rye and some ice.

It was still Saturday night and I was still entitled to a drink, without strange blondes butting in.

But when the drinks came, I found the blonde was still with me. Prancing around inside my skull, making propositions, winking her diamonds at me.

It didn't take me long to finish the bottle and it didn't take the bottle long to finish me.

Somewhere along the line I managed to undress, don pajamas, and slump across the bed. Somewhere along the line I drifted off to sleep.

And that's when it started.

I was back in the burlesque house, sitting in the crummy seat, watching the stage. This time the performance was more interesting. There was a new comic in the cast—a tall fellow with a shaved head. He looked something like Cono. In fact, he was Cono. Big as life. A chorus line danced out behind him; eight, count 'em, eight nifty little numbers. They danced, kicked, whirled. Cono noticed them. He did a little shuffling dance of his own, gyrating to the end of the line. Then he reached out—in the old familiar gesture used by the late Ted Healy in chastising his stooges—and flicked them across the neck. One by

one. As his fingers touched each girl in turn, she changed.

Heads dangled limply from broken necks. The eight dancing girls became eight dancing cadavers. Eight, count 'em, eight. The dancing dead. The dancing dead, with skulls for heads. Skulls with diamond eyes.

Dead arms reached out and scrambled in dead skull-sockets. They picked out the diamonds and threw them at me. I twisted and turned, sweated and squirmed, but I couldn't dodge. The diamonds hit me, seared me with icy fire.

Cono laughed. The girls danced off stage and he was all alone. All alone except for the chair. It stood there in the center of the stage and the lights went down. As the spotlight narrowed, Cono moved towards its center, closer to the chair. He had to stay within the circle of light or die.

**T**HEN THE circle narrowed still further and he was sitting in the chair. As if by magic, squirrels danced out on the stage. They each carried a tiny thong, and each bound the thong around Cono's arm or leg or neck until he sat there crisscrossed with thongs that lashed him to the chair.

I don't have to tell you what kind of a chair it was. What else would it be?

And I don't have to tell you what was going to happen next. Even in my dream I knew it, and I struggled frantically to wake up.

But I couldn't. I couldn't even leave my seat in the theatre. Because while I had been watching Cono getting bound into the chair, somebody had bound me!

Now I was sitting in an electric chair, hands tied, feet tied, electrodes clamped and ready. I tugged and tore, but I couldn't move. They had me, all right. It had all been a trick, a

dirty trick to get my attention away from myself.

I knew that now. Because suddenly Cono burst his bonds with a flick of his fingers, the same fingers that had killed the dancing girls. He stood up and laughed because it was a joke. A joke on me.

He wasn't going to die. I was. He'd live. He'd get the eight thousand dollars and the blonde, and I'd fry. Just as soon as they turned on the juice. The bonded juice. The neon lights were winking now and the bartender was ready to pull the switch as soon as the conductor called out "Chicago!" and now they were getting ready to give the signal. While waiting, Cono stood on the stage and amused me with card tricks. He pulled the Ace of Spades out of his mouth and held it up for me to see.

Then it was time. Somebody came onstage and handed him a telegram from the carney and that was the signal for them to yell "Chicago!"

The switch was ready. I felt the cold sweat running down my spine, felt the electrodes bite into the side of my leg, the side of my head. And then, they pulled the switch—

I woke up.

I woke up, sat up in bed and stared out the window.

Through the windowpane, the blonde stared back at me.

I could only see her face, and that was funny, because it was a full window. Then I realized it was because she wasn't vertical, but horizontal. And only her face was pointed towards me.

Shall I make it plainer?

I mean she was floating in empty air outside my window.

Floating in empty air and smiling at me with her icy eyes aglitter.

Then I really woke up.

The second dream, or the second part of the dream, was so real I had

to stagger over to the window and convince myself that there was no one outside. It took me a minute before my trembling legs would support me and carry me that distance, so if she really had been at the window there'd have been enough time for her to get back down the fire-escape and disappear.

Of course she wasn't there.

And she couldn't have been, because there was no fire-escape. I gazed down at a sheer drop of five floors to the closed and empty courtyard below. It was black down there, black as the Ace of Spades.

I don't know what I should have done under the circumstances; all I know is what I did do.

I shoved my head under the cold water faucet, towelled my face dry, dressed, and rushed out of my room in search of a drink.

And that's when the next nightmare started.

**T**HERE WAS this little joint three blocks south of the hotel. I ran all the way, couldn't stop running until I'd covered that much distance. The street was deserted and it was dark, and only this little joint had a rose light burning in the window. It was the light that drew me, because I was afraid of the dark.

I opened the door and a blast of smoke and sound hit me in the face but I ploughed through it blindly to the bar.

"Shot of whiskey!" I said, and meant it.

The bartender was a tall, thin man and he had a glass eye that almost fell out as he bent his head while pouring my drink. I didn't pay very much attention to it at the time; I was too busy getting the drink down.

Then it fascinated me. I didn't want to stare at it, so I looked away—looked down the bar, into the seeth-

ing center of smoke and sound.

That was a mistake.

Sitting on the stool next to me was a little man who was sipping a glass of beer. He had to sip, because he had no arms. He lapped at the glass the way a cat laps at a saucer of cream. Watching him was a blind man. Don't ask me how I knew he could see, but I got the impression of watching from the tilt of the head, the focus of the dark glasses.

I whirled around and nearly collided with the man on crutches. He was standing there arguing with the man on the floor—the one without legs. Down the bar a way, somebody was banging with a steel hook affixed to his elbow. I could scarcely hear the thumping because the juke box was playing so loudly. Sure enough, there were dancers present; the inevitable two women, both of them engrossed in their movements. They had to watch carefully, because both of them were on crutches.

There were others present, too—others in the booths. The man with the bandaged head. The man with the hole where his nose should be. The man with the great purple growth bulging over his collar. The lame, the halt, the blind.

They didn't pay any attention to me. They were having fun. And in a moment I realized what I'd stumbled into. It was a street beggar's tavern. I saw the tin cup set alongside the shotglass, the placard resting against the beer bottle. What was the name of that dump in Victor Hugo's *Notre Dame de Paris*? "The Court of Miracles" he called it. And this was it.

They were happy enough, drinking. They forgot their physical ills. Maybe liquor would cure me of my mental ills. It was worth a try. So I had another drink.

Along about the third drink somebody must have slipped out. Along

about the fourth drink somebody must have come back. And in a minute or two, she walked in.

I DIDN'T SEE her, at first. The reason I sensed her presence was because the noise cut down. The juke box stopped and didn't start again. The conversation dropped to a hush.

That's when I looked around and noticed her. She was sitting in a booth, all alone, just watching me.

She made a little gesture of invitation and I shook my head. That was all. Then she raised her glass and offered me a silent toast.

I turned, noted my re-filled glass, and toasted her. Then I downed my drink. The bartender with the glass eye had another waiting for me.

"On the lady," he said.

"No thanks, chum."

He looked at me. "Whatsa matter? She's a nice lady."

"Sure she is. Nobody's questioning that."

"So whyn'cha drink it?"

"I've had enough, that's why." I had, enough and to spare, I suddenly realized. The room was beginning to spin a little.

"Come on, drink up. We're all friends here."

The bartender didn't look friendly. Neither did anyone else. For the first time I grew aware of the fact that everyone was looking at me. Not at her—at me. The legless, the armless, the blind. In fact, the blind man took off his dark glasses in order to see me better, and one of the cripples leaned his crutch on the bar and walked a little closer.

*The Court of Miracles!* Where the blind see and the lame walk! Of course it was; and half of these beggars were fakes. They were as sound as I was—sounder, perhaps.

And there was a whole roomful of them, all looking at me. None of them

seemed happy any longer. They were quiet; so quiet I could hear the click of the key in the lock as the armless man locked the door.

Oh, he had arms now; they'd emerged from beneath a bulky vest. But I wasn't interested in that. I was interested in the fact that the door was locked. And I was here, inside.

She stared and they stared.

The bartender said, "How about it, chum?"

"Not today." I stood up. That is, I tried to stand up. My legs were wobbly. Something was wrong with them. Something was wrong with my eyes, too.

"What's the trouble?" drawled the bartender. "Afraid of being slipped a Mickey?"

"No!" It was hard to talk. Only gasps came out. "You already slipped me one the drink before this. When she came in, and gave you the signal."

"Wise guy, huh?"

"Yes!" I managed to spin around, fast. Fast enough to grab the whiskey-bottle off the bar and hold it cocked. My other hand supported me.

"Now—open that door or I'll let you have it," I panted. "Come on, move fast."

The bartender shrugged. There was neither fear nor malice in his glass eye.

My own eyes were turning to glass. I tried to focus them on the bartender, tried not to look at the creeping, crawling cripples that slithered closer all around me, brandishing canes and crutches and uttering little grunts and whimpers and moans.

"Open that door!" I wheezed, while they crept closer and closer, stretching out their arms and tensing to spring.

"All right, chum!"

That was the signal for them to rush me. Somebody swung a crutch, somebody clawed at my legs. I began

to spin and go down.

I swung the bottle, clearing an arc, and they fell back, but only for a moment. The bartender aimed a punch, so I swung the bottle again.

Then they came back. It was like fighting underwater, like fighting in a dream. And this was a dream, a nightmare of crawlers, of slithering shapes tearing at me, dragging me down.

The bartender hit me again, so I raised the bottle and brought it down. It landed on his head with a dull crunch.

For a moment he stood there, and the glass eye popped out of its socket and rolled along the bar. It stared up at him and watched as he sagged slowly and fell.

Then it stared at me as the man with the artificial arm hit me across the neck with the hook.

I felt the blow land and melt my spine.

The glass eye watched as I collapsed into roaring darkness and when I went down, it winked.

WHEN I woke up, she was stroking my forehead.

Not bad. Lots of men would have traded places with me at the moment—lying there in the cool dusk, on a comfortable bed, with a beautiful blonde stroking my forehead.

Too bad some other guy didn't show up, because I would have traded him in a flash.

I'd have thrown in a splitting headache, free of charge, and a taste in the mouth like the bottom of the Chicago Drainage Canal.

But nobody showed up to take my place, so I just stayed there. When she said, "Drink this," I drank. When she said, "Close your eyes and wait for the pain to go away," I closed my eyes and waited.

Miraculously, the pain went away.

The headache and the taste vanished. I opened my eyes again, wiggled my fingers and toes.

I was lying on this bed in a darkened room. The shades were drawn, but enough light filtered through to bring life to the diamond choker and the diamond ring and the diamond eyes. The diamond eyes regarded me candidly.

"Feel better now?"

"Yes."

"That's good. Then there's nothing to worry about."

How right she was. Nothing to worry about except where I was, and why. I suppose a little of my bitterness crept over into my reply.

"Thanks," I said. "Thanks for everything you've done for me. Including getting me knocked out."

"That's no way to look at it," answered the blonde. "After all, I saved your life"

"You mean those beggars would have killed me?"

"No. But the police might."

"Police?"

"Yes." She drew a long breath. "After all, you did murder that bartender."

"What?"

"You hit him with the bottle. He's dead."

I sat up, faster than I would have believed possible. "Come on, let me out of here," I snapped.

"They'll be on the lookout for you," she told me. "It's not safe for you to go just now. You're among friends here."

"Friends!"

"Don't misunderstand. If you'd only listened to me in the first place and come along sensibly, all this would never have happened."

**I** HAD NO answer for that one. All

I knew was that if she spoke the truth. I was a murderer. And I knew

what they did to murderers. They sat them down in a chair and turned on the juice and fried them. A faint odor of singed flesh tainted my nostrils.

"How do I know you're not lying?" I asked.

"I can furnish proof if you like, later. Right now, I want you to meet a friend." She put her hand on my shoulder and even through the shirt I could feel the icy coldness of her flesh. She was cold and hard, like a diamond.

"As long as I'm meeting friends, we might as well establish a few facts," I suggested. "You know my name. Now, what's yours? And where am I?"

She smiled and stood up. "My name is Vera. Vera LaValle. We are in a home on the South Side. And, although you didn't think to ask me, it's Monday evening. You've been unconscious for almost forty-eight hours."

I stood up, then. It wasn't a spectacular performance. I glanced down at myself in the dim light and what I saw wasn't pretty.

"Why don't you go in and bathe, clean up a bit?" Vera suggested. "I'll go out and bring back some food. You can eat it before our meeting."

Without waiting for my reply, she went out. Went out and locked the door.

It was getting to be a habit. Everybody that I met locked me in. Of course, that's what you do with murderers. Dangerous people to have around. Always killing bartenders, for instance. And if I was a murderer . . .

I doubted it. The whole thing was phoney from start to finish. Things like that just didn't happen to me. I was the original timid soul. Couldn't lick my weight in wild flowers.

Then, again . . .

There was blood on my suit. Blood





It was like trying to fight a dream, the way all these weird slithering figures came at me

on my shirt. Blood on the back of my neck, crusted blood from where the steel hook had landed.

I went into the bathroom, filled the tub, undressed, bathed. There was a nice array of soap and towels, all laid out and waiting for me. I even found an electric shaver to plug in. I felt a lot better once I was cleaned up.

When I dressed, I was surprised to discover a fresh white shirt conveniently placed on top of a clothes hamper. My genial host or hostess thought of everything.

By the time I stepped out of the bathroom she had returned. She had four sandwiches wrapped in cellophane, a double cardboard cup of coffee, and a wedge of pie. She didn't say anything while I ate. It only took me about six minutes to dispose of the meal and latch onto a cigarette from my pocket. I offered her one.

"No, thanks. I do not smoke."

"Funny. I thought all women did nowadays."

"I tried it once. Many years ago. Of course, it wasn't a cigarette."

This didn't seem to be getting me anywhere. "About that friend I was going to meet. Where is he?"

"Waiting outside the door," she said. "Shall I ask him in?"

"By all means. Don't keep the gentleman waiting." My tone was facetious, but I didn't feel very gay. I don't know what I really expected. Years of reading—and writing—horror fiction had conditioned me to almost everything. A Mad Doctor, perhaps, coming to recommend a certain brand of cigarettes. A Mad Scientist with a beaker-full of monkey glands. A Mad Professor with a driver's license for a flying saucer.

THE LAST person I expected to see when the door opened was a friend. But it was a friend who walked in.

It was Cono.

Cono Colluri. The man who died in the electric chair.

He stood there in the twilight and looked at me. He wore a battered trench-coat with the collar turned up, and he had a hat pulled down over his eyes like a movie gangster, but I recognized him. It wasn't a double, or a stooge, or somebody made up to resemble him. It was Cono. Cono in the flesh. The dead flesh—reanimate and alive!

Changed? Of course he had changed. There was a dreadful facial tic, where the muscles had been pulled and torn by the convulsive spasm of the shock. And he was pale. Pale as death. But he lived. He walked. He talked....

"Hello, Bob. I've been waiting for you."

"She—she told me."

"Too bad you wouldn't come at once. I should have used more sense, let her tell you who wanted to see you. But I figured you wouldn't of believed her."

"Yes. I guess that's right." I fumbled for words while he stood there, stood there looking at me. "How—how are you?"

That was a fine thing to ask. But he didn't seem to mind.

In fact, he smiled. The smile creased the side of his face and got tangled up in the tic, but he made it. "Oh, I'll live," he said. "I'll live forever."

"What?"

"That's the pitch, Bob. That's why I had to see you. I'm going to live forever. Varek fixed that."

Varek? Where had I heard that name before?

"He's the one who claimed my body. You remember."

Yes, I remembered. The mysterious cousin. "But how did he know you weren't dead, and how did he revive you?"

"I was dead, Bob. Deader'n a

doornail. And he fixed me up. He can fix anybody up, Bob. Bring them back. Make it so's they never die. And that's where you come in."

"Me?"

"I been telling him about you. About how smart you are, all that stuff you write. He needs somebody like you for the outside—to front. Somebody with brains. Young. And alive."

**A**LIVE. I was alive, all right, but I wondered if I was awake and sane. Talking to a dead man...

"Come here, Bob. I can see you don't believe me."

I moved closer to Cono.

"Feel my skin. Go ahead."

I put my hand on his wrist. It was cold. Cold, but solid. Up close I could see the waxen pallor of Cono's face. Cono's death-mask. The tic rippled across it and he smiled again.

"Don't be scared. I'm real. It's real. He can do it. He can bring back the dead. Don't you see what it means? What a big thing it is, if it's handled right?"

"I see. But I still can't understand where I fit in."

"Varek will tell you all about it. Come on, I want you to talk to him."

I followed Cono Colluri out of the room. Vera smiled and nodded as we left, but she didn't accompany us as we walked down the long corridor to a stairway. Descending the stairs into the soft, subdued light of the parlors below, I became conscious of a peculiar odor. It smelled like stale air, steam heat and the scent of mingled flowers.

"Say, just where are we, anyway?" I asked.

"Funeral home," Cono answered. "Didn't you know?"

I hadn't known. But I might have guessed. Living quarters upstairs and down here the parlors. The parlors,

the soft lights and the scent of flowers.

We walked across a carpeted hallway, and I glanced around me. It was the way Cono had said; this was a funeral home, and a rather shabby one. Perhaps that's why there were no bodies lying in state, no mourners. Varek had set this up for a front, and I rather suspected that if I made a dash for it and tried the front door I would find it locked.

But I didn't make a dash for it. I followed Cono into the darkened parlor to the left, to meet Mr. Varek.

I walked in and Cono lumbered over to the corner. He walked stiffly, awkwardly. The muscles in his body were taut with shock. But he did pretty well for a dead man.

He was turning on a lamp in the corner, he was closing the door behind us. I paid no attention. I was staring down at the coffin on the trestle. Staring down at the body in the coffin. The body of the man with the glass eye.

It was the bartender I'd killed.

**H**E LAY there on the cheap satin, dressed in a worn black suit. Somebody had put the glass eye back in place and it stared up at me sardonically. The other eye was closed, and the general effect was that of a wink.

There we were—me and the man I'd killed. I looked at him, and he looked at me.

*He looked at me!*

Yes. It happened. The eyelid rolled back. The eye opened. It focussed on me. And the mouth, the bound mouth, relaxed its smirk. The lips parted.

And from the corpse came the voice: "Hello, Bob. I'm Nicolo Varek."

"You—"

"Oh, I'm not the bartender you killed. He's dead enough, as you can see for yourself. His body isn't breathing."

It wasn't, either. The corpse was still a corpse, but something was alive, something lived inside it. Lived and looked and talked.

"I'm just taking temporary residence. So that I can talk to you, without having to travel a great distance. You can appreciate the convenience."

I couldn't, at that moment. I could only stand and gape and feel the sweat trickling down under my armpits.

"You've been a long time coming, Bob. But it was inevitable that we should meet. Cono has told me all about you, and of course I have other ways of gaining information. Many ways."

"I'm sure." It came out before I could stop it, but the corpse chuckled. The sound was a death-rattle.

"How typical of you to say that. How characteristic! Ah, yes, I've studied your background, your work. You interest me greatly. That is why I have gone to all this trouble to arrange our meeting."

I nodded, but said nothing. I was waiting.

"I'm inclined to give Cono credit for finding you. It's quite true, I can use you."

"Dead or alive?" That remark came out before I could stop it, too.

"Alive, of course. But don't think I'm not appreciative of the distinction. You're a man of keen wit, sir. And I admire you for it. One seldom finds acerbity in these decadent days."

"Look," I said, beginning to recover a little composure. "I'm not used to indulging in character analysis with a corpse. Just what do you want of me?"

"Your services, sir. Your professional services. For which, needless to say, you will be generously rewarded. In perpetuity, I might add."

"Cut the double-talk. I've had enough from Vera, and from poor

Cono—"

"Poor Cono? I would hardly endorse the adjective. Were it not for me, my dear sir, Cono would be languishing in an unmarked grave. Whereas, thanks to my efforts, he is among the quick rather than the dead. And if you wish plain talk, sir, you shall have it.

"I am Nicolo Varek, man of science. I have perfected a means, a methodology, a therapy if you like, which defeats what men call death. Defeats death? It goes beyond that, far beyond. For those whom I revive also possess the boon of eternal life. Eternal life!"

**CRAZY TALK.** But it was coming from the mouth of a corpse, and I believed it. There was no hint of fakery or collusion—no ventriloquist could open that cadaver's eye, manipulate his dead lips. I saw, and I heard. And I believed.

"Yes, I can give life to the dead. As to the how and the why of it, well, that's my secret. My priceless, precious, perfect secret.

"And what do you think the use of that secret is worth, sir? What is the proper fee for the boon of eternal life? A million dollars, perhaps?

"There are many men with a million dollars in this world, my friend. Do you think any of them would hesitate to part with that sum if I could assure them of continued existence?

"But there's the rub. They must be assured. And at the same time the secret must remain a secret. For this reason I must continue to operate anonymously. There is nothing men would stop at in order to extract my secret from me—if I were known to them as its possessor. How often I've faced torture and death myself at the hands of those who suspected I might save them!

"You say I have helpers aplenty? That I can summon up an army of the dead, if need be, to assist me in my aims? That is true—but only within certain limits. The dead must be controlled. And I cannot carry out my plans completely without the aid of living humanity. I need a man of prescience, a man of integrity. Such as yourself, sir."

"I don't see what you're driving at."

"A business arrangement. You might even go so far as to call it a partnership. With myself as the silent partner, you as the go-between. Our product: Eternal life. Our goal: Unlimited wealth, unlimited power."

"Sounds a bit too easy."

"Do not mistake it, my friend. There are innumerable obstacles to overcome, many problems to face and to solve. I can provide for them all, however. This has been a cherished dream of mine for centuries. Yes, centuries."

"Who are you, anyway?"

THE CORPSE chuckled. "So many men have asked that question of me, so many times! Yet I find it best not to answer. My handiwork is proof that I speak truth, and that is all you need. Trust me, and we shall rule."

"Yes, rule! Surely you can see what power lies in my secret. The hold it will give us both over the great ones of this world, now and forever! We'll seek our fortunes first, and the rest shall come."

"I have the plans well laid. You will be able to go forth and proclaim the gift of eternal life to the world. Nor shall you lack for assistance. I can summon a host to your command, to do your bidding and mine. We shall broadcast the tidings: There is no more death, for those who can pay the price! Eternal life, and more; special powers, new powers."

"But you'll learn all this and more

in time to come. You'll learn the methods I've devised for bringing the news to the world. Of course, it would never do to make a really public announcement or statement; it must all be cloaked in mysticism and the proper formulae. We'll start a cult, attract the wealthy, and reveal the truth only to the select few."

"Now, sir, how does my proposal strike you? Eternal life, eternal riches, eternal power?"

I didn't say anything for a long moment. I stared at the corpse that told me men could live forever.

"Silence means consent," said the voice.

"Not necessarily. I was just wondering—what if I refuse?"

"I'm sorry you even mention the possibility. For it forces me to remind you that you really have no choice in the matter."

"You mean you'll kill me if I don't? Kill me and animate my corpse, I suppose?"

"Come now, surely you give me credit for more subtlety than that? I've already gone to a great deal of trouble and risk to bring you here, as you know. I cannot jeopardize my plans to any further extent. And you would be of no use to me as a corpse. Besides, there is no need for me to kill you. If you walk out of here, you're as good as dead anyway."

"Meaning?"

"Meaning that you are wanted for murder. For killing this poor one-eyed citizen of a free republic. The bartender."

"But he's alive, you've revived him—"

"Not like the others! It's purely temporary, you understand. I can keep him animated as long as I choose, and I will do so if you consent. I'll even put him back to work in the bar." Again the chuckle. "It won't be the first time a dead man

has walked abroad with none the wiser. If only you knew or even suspected how many of the dead presently mingle with the living, thanks to the Varek method!"

**I** SHUDDERED. The single eye of the corpse was omniscient. The voice purred on: "If you refuse, he becomes a corpse again. With a dozen witnesses to swear you killed him. I'll not wreak vengeance—the full majesty of the law will attend to that. And your story of mysterious women and corpses that talk and a walking dead man will not help you or save you. I believe you realize that.

"But you won't refuse. Because you can see what I'm offering you. Wealth and power. The goals, the dreams of every man. A chance for eternal life yourself, such as I enjoy. Think it over, sir, think well upon it. Life or death?"

I thought. I thought well upon it. And everything within me clamored for assent. Oh, it's easy enough to be a hero when there's no temptation. But the cynic who said every man has his price knew human nature. There aren't many who wouldn't settle for eternal life, eternal wealth and eternal power even at the price of their souls—and the souls of everyone else, for that matter.

The souls of everyone else...

I looked at Cono. My friend, Cono Colluri. The *late* Cono Colluri who went to his death looking like an overgrown college boy. Cono, who left me eight thousand bucks and a promise to clear his name.

Where was Cono now?

He wasn't here in this room. His body was here, and it moved and it talked, but the soul...

There was a tic, there was torment, there was twisting torture. Not real life. This was a stranger, a hulking

walking corpse. No emotion, no warmth, no *humanity*.

Sure, I could sell myself out. But I couldn't sell out the world.

So I stared down at the corpse and I said, "No. I'm sorry, Varek. I've got to refuse, and take my chances."

"The decision is final?"

"Final."

"Very well. You've had your chance."

The mouth shut. The eye closed. The dead bartender was truly dead again. I saw the light fade away from the countenance, then I moved back. Back, into Cono Colluri's arms.

I might have known Varek would lie. That he'd never let me out of that room alive. If I hadn't realized it before, I knew it now. Because the cold arms wrapped around me. And the great thumbs rose up to my neck, ready to press and squeeze.

"Cono!" I gasped. "It's me—your friend—don't—"

You can't argue with a corpse.

You can only fight. Fight and pant, and try to keep the strangling hands away from your throat. I hit him with everything I had. Nothing happened. Nothing happened, except that he bent me back, back...

I sagged then. Sagged so suddenly that he went down with me. As I fell, I twisted. His grip broke. I rolled under the trestle. He groped after me. I dumped coffin and all on his head. He went down. Blind corpse-eyes sought me. I ran. I made it down the hall with no one to stop me. He lumbered to his feet, came groping after me.

I knew the front door would be locked. But there was a glass panel, and next to it in the hall somebody had placed a large urn.

I grabbed it up, smashed the glass, and stepped through.

Then I was out on the street, running. It was night. The air was cool.

It was good to be free.

Free, and wanted for murder.

**H**AVE YOU ever wondered what it feels like to be a murderer?

I can tell you.

It feels like rabbits who hear the baying of a hunting dog. It feels like lying in bed with the covers pulled over your head and Pa coming up the stairs to give you a spanking. It feels like waiting for the Doctor to sterilize the instruments.

You don't walk down the street when you're a murderer. You skulk through the alleys. You don't take the streetcar and you don't pass any cops. And when you finally get downtown to your hotel, you wait a long time before you go inside the lobby. You look around very carefully to make sure it's deserted.

And when you do go in, you don't ask for the key to your room. The police might be waiting up there. Or somebody else. Somebody that's dead, but alive. Waiting to grab you and—

I had the feeling, but I kept it out of my face and voice long enough to ask the clerk at the desk whether or not there had been any message for me.

You see, I had to play one hunch; that the hotel hadn't been tipped off. Varek wouldn't, as long as he thought I was coming in with him. And now, there was still that chance. If I could only get the message....

It was waiting for me, the precious little yellow envelope stuck in the pigeonhole. The telegram from the carney. I ripped it open and read: "GREAT AHMED AT FORTY THREE EAST BRENT STREET UNDER NAME RICHARDS."

That was all, and it was enough. Brent was a street on the near North side. Walking distance. I could take an El and bypass the Loop, if I was willing to risk it.

I was. Ahmed, or Richards, had the money.

I had to. Ahmed, or Richards, could save me.

I did. Ahmed, or Richards, was the answer.

Brent Street was about a mile across the bridge after I left the El. It was a long, hard mile. I kept to the shadows, kept my face averted from passersby. But nothing happened. I stopped in front of the dingy old brownstone front that was graced with the numerals 43, lit my last cigarette, and went up the steps to press the buzzer.

Then I waited.

It was a good two minutes before the door opened. During that time I speculated quite a bit about the man I was going to meet.

**WOULD IT** be the Great Ahmed in a turban? A swarthy man with a pointed beard, deepset burning eyes and a singsong voice?

Would it be the suave, cultivated, cosmopolitan Mr. Richards, a con man from the carney, dressed a little too garishly, with a voice too soft and smooth?

It was important for me to know. Because I'd have to throw myself on the man's mercy.

The door opened to answer my question.

"The Great Ahmed?" I asked.

"Yes. Please come in."

I came in. Into the light of the hallway, where I could see my host.

He wasn't Ahmed and he wasn't Richards, either.

He was nobody.

A small man of about fifty, with thin, graying hair. Wrinkled face, watery blue eyes, almost gray. Come to think about it, his skin was gray, too. And he wore a gray suit. Quiet and inconspicuous. About as far away from a carney type as I could have



possibly imagined.

How to describe him? In Hollywood, he'd be what they'd call a Barry Fitzgerald type without the smile and the brogue. Somebody's uncle. The kindly bachelor uncle.

I hoped he'd be mine.

"You are the Great Ahmed?" I asked, still not sure, still not sold.

"Yes. You want a reading?"

"Uh...yes."

I might as well stall for a while until I was sure. The way things had been happening, I wouldn't have trusted my own brother.

It was a big house, an old house, one of those places built for people to live in at a time when most families had eight or nine children instead of a television set.

The Great Ahmed led me down a long hallway, past two or three doors leading, inevitably, to a sunporch, a parlor, a library. The room he ushered me into was a sort of secondary parlor, towards the rear of the house. It had plenty of solid mahogany in it; old pieces, but durable. There was a massive center table and the inevitable grouping of chairs as if for a seance. But there was nothing of the medium's workshop or the clairvoyant's clip-joint about this place.

I TOOK advantage of the light in the room to study my host a little more closely, but I can't say I learned much. He was just a tired, middle-aged man, and I wondered how he managed the grift with a tough carney outfit. He didn't look the part of an Oriental mystic at all.

Even when he told me to sit down and produced a crystal ball from a cupboard, I wasn't impressed. The ball itself was small, and a trifle dusty. As a matter of fact, he brushed it off with his sleeve, smiling sheepishly as he did so.

Then he sat down, stared into the

ball, and smiled again.

"The reading is three dollars," he said. "An offering, you understand, not a fee. Fee's against the law here."

"Shoot the three bucks," I said.

"Very well." His eyes left my face. They focussed on the ball. Gray eyes, a trifle bloodshot.

I sat very quietly while he stared. He cleared his throat. He fidgeted. Then he spoke.

He told me my name.

He told me where I'd been working.

"You are a friend of the late Cono Colluri," he said, his eyes downcast. "And you are here to collect his money. A sum amounting to eight thousand, two hundred and thirty-one dollars."

He paused. I felt the perspiration running along the collar of my nice white shirt—the one from the funeral parlor, probably stolen off a stiff.

He paused, and I stared at him. Nice little man in gray, but he knew too much. I'd never believed in "occult powers", and yet here he was, telling me these things.

After what I'd gone through in the past three days, I felt that I couldn't take much more. My whole concept of the universe was shattering, and along with it, my sanity. Dead men walking, me a murderer, and now a man who actually reads minds. It was too much....

"Take it easy, friend." The Great Ahmed stood up, slowly. "I didn't mean to upset you so. It was a cheap trick, I guess."

His hands moved upwards from under the table. They held an envelope and a sheet of paper.

With a start, I recognized Cono's letter.

"Picked it out of your pocket when I brushed against you in the hall," smiled the little man. "Then held it under the table and read it while you thought I was reading the crystal. Old

bit of business, but effective."

I nodded, and tried to smile in a way that conveyed my relief.

"So you're Cono's friend," said the Great Ahmed. "He wrote me about you, you know. A couple of weeks ago. Didn't mention the money, though. It was a tragedy, wasn't it?"

"Then you know about the confession?"

"Yes. Louie was a rat." The smile left his face. "Too bad, a messy business. I'm glad I left the show."

He walked around to the cabinet, stooped, and opened the lower drawer with a small key. He took out a big black tin box. Another key opened it. He began to pile bills on the table—big bills, hundreds and thousands.

"Here's your money," he said, sorting a pile and pushing it across to me.

"But...don't you want some kind of paper, some kind of identification or signature?"

"You're Cono's friend. I trust you." He smiled shyly, and his hands made a gesture of dismissal.

"You trust me, eh?"

"Why not?"

**I** TOOK a deep breath and came out with it. I had to come out with it to somebody, or go crazy. "Because I'm wanted for murder, that's why!"

The Great Ahmed sat down again, still smiling. "And you want to tell me all about it, is that it? Well, go ahead. I'm listening."

I went ahead, and he listened. It took up a long time, but I told him the whole story—from the time I hit town until the time Cono hit me.

He sat there, a little gray idol, quietly gazing off into the gloom.

"And so now you want to clear your name, eh? And rescue Cono, I suppose? And put the finger on this man Varek, whoever he may be?"

I nodded.

"That's a big order. A mighty big

order, friend. You know, of course, that your whole story sounds a bit implausible?"

"It sounds screwier than blazes," I told him. "But it's true. Every word of it."

"Granted. So the problem arises, where do we go from here?"

I glanced at the eight grand plus, lying before me on the table. Suddenly I shoved it back across to him.

"Will this help you to figure things out for me?" I asked. "Because if it will, take it. Part of it or all of it. Whatever it may cost to clear me, to save Cono. To pin a rap on that rat, Varek."

"You trust me to come in with you?" he asked.

"I've trusted you with my story. With my life. The money isn't important. If you're Cono's friend, you'll help."

"Good enough." The Great Ahmed sorted the bills and stacked them up next to the tin box. "From now on, I'm your man. Full time. Now to our problem." He pushed the crystal ball aside. "This won't help us any, I'm afraid. We have to face facts."

"Fact number one," I said, "is that the heat is on me."

"Which means you'll have to lay low. That makes me the outside man," he said.

"Correct. So it's your move."

"My move is to the hotel," Ahmed answered. "To your room. Sooner or later somebody is going to show up there, looking for you. The law will be around. But so will your blonde charmer, and some of the rest of Varek's friends. Perhaps even Cono himself. At any rate, chances are I'll find someone to tail; someone who will lead me to the funeral home or wherever else Varek hides out. He probably has a dozen or more places to hang his hat. If he wears a hat."

"I keep wondering," I mused.

"What kind of a creature is this man? And his secret of eternal life—"

"He may have it," Ahmed retorted, "but you don't. And from the looks of you, a little sleep is in order. I'll take you upstairs to a bedroom. You might as well get a good night's rest while I go to work."

**I** DIDN'T argue with him. The weariness pulled at my knees as I followed him up the stairs.

"You'll have to trust to me and to luck," said the little gray man. "Right now all I can tell you is I'm playing a hunch. That I can go back to the hotel, pick up the trail, and somehow have it lead me to Cono. He's the weak spot in the whole setup, for us. If I can handle him, he'll tell me what we have to know about Varek. Then we'll figure out how to deal with him."

"Sounds logical," I said, as we entered a small bedroom at the end of the corridor.

"Sounds mighty weak and flimsy, to tell the truth," replied my host. "But it's all we have to work on right now. I hope that by the time I return there'll be a little more to work on. Now—here we are. You don't fit into my pajamas, but I think you'll find the bed is comfortable enough. I'll be on my way. Go to sleep, and pleasant dreams to you."

He waved and went out. I sank back on the bed, scarcely mindful of the click of the key in the lock. Then I sat up. "Here we go again!" I muttered.

My voice must have carried, because he called from beyond the door. "Locking you in. Got a cleaning woman who gets here in about an hour, and I don't want to take any chances. If your description has been broadcast, that is."

"Good enough," I answered. "But you'd better come back."

"I'll be back. And with good news. Don't you worry about a thing. When the Great Ahmed takes over, he takes over."

I lay back, kicked off my shoes, loosened my tie and belt, and then crawled under the covers. His footsteps receded into silence.

Here I was, in a strange house, in a strange bed, my future dependent on the integrity and the ability of a man I hadn't known a half hour.

Somehow, though, I trusted him. I had to trust him, of course, because there was nobody else. I wondered about the Great Ahmed, or Richards—if that was his real name. What he'd been doing hanging around a carney. Why he'd set up a three-dollar-a-throw crystal reading parlor here. Little colorless middle-aged nobody, without even a good line of patter to hand out. But the son-of-a-gun knew how to pick pockets!

That reassured me. He wasn't the schmoe he appeared to be. But was he good enough to handle a man who raised the dead?

I couldn't answer that one now. There was nothing to do but wait. Wait and rest. Rest and sleep.

The room was dark. The night came in at me through the window. I got up and pulled the shade. I didn't want the night. It contained too much that could hurt me. Police, detectives, Varek and the walking dead. Better the special darkness of the room, the special darkness behind my closed eyes. The darkness of sleep.

The darkness of dreams....

**F**UNNY, the people you run into when you're asleep. Like this negro, for instance. He was just a common citizen, like hundreds of thousands of others on Chicago's South Side. He was riding on the El and I was riding on the El, hanging on to the strap next to him.

I wouldn't have even given him a second glance, except for one little thing.

He was dead.

Yes, he was dead. When the El lurched, and he toppled against me, and I saw the rolling whites of his empty eyes, felt the cold, the ebon coldness of his black skin, I knew he was dead. A black corpse, hanging to a strap in the El.

I knew he was dead, and he knew I knew it. Because he smiled. And the deep bass voice rumbled up from the depths—from the depths of his empty grave, his plundered and cheated grave—and he said, "Don't look at me. 'Cause I ain't the only one. They's a lot of 'em dead around heah. A lot of 'em. Look!"

I looked. I gazed down the aisle of the lurching El and I saw them, recognized them. Some of the passengers were alive, of course, and I could tell that at a glance. But there were others. Many others. The quiet ones. The ones with the fixed, cold stares. The ones who didn't talk. Who sat alone. Who carefully avoided touching other bodies. They were pale, they were stiff, they were dead.

Most of the men wore their good suits, because that's the way they were dressed in the undertaking parlors. Most of the women wore too much powder and rouge, because the morticians fixed them that way. Oh, I recognized them. And the Negro nudged me with his icy finger and grinned a grin that held neither mirth nor malice nor any human emotion.

"Zombies," he said. "Tha's what they calls us. Zombies. Walkin' dead. Walkin', talkin' dead. Walkin' and talkin' because the Man say so. The Man. The Big Voodoo Man."

"Varek!" I said.

The El lurched again. The lights went out. Something was happening to the power. Maybe because I'd

spoken the name.

The black corpse thought so. In the darkness all I saw was eye-white and tooth-white, flashing at me. "You went and done it," the voice rumbled. "Sayin' the name!"

And all the corpses in all the cars groaned and murmured, "He said the name!"

**S**UDDENLY THE car gave a sickening lurch and I knew we were going off the track, going over. The corpses rolled against me in waves, and we were twisting and turning, falling, falling...

I landed. You're supposed to wake up before you land, but I didn't. Because I went too deep. The car crashed down into the sewers. I wasn't hurt. I was flung free. And I crawled along in the darkness, without eye-white and tooth-white flashing. Just red, this time. Little red lights.

"Rats," I told myself. "Rat eyes."

"We take the form of rats, yes. And of bats. And of other things. But we are not animals. We are not men either." The voice at my ear was soft but imperative. "They call us—vampires!"

I couldn't see him, or the others, but I heard the chattering laughter rise all around me, rise and turn to metallic mockery as it boomed off the sewer walls.

"Vampires. He raised us from the dead, he made us. In the big church up on Division Street, Father Stanislaus makes the Holy Sign against us. But we do not care. He is fat and old, that priest, and he will die. We can never die. We walk the night, we feast, and we own the world below."

Another voice droned in: "It's like this under the whole city, did you know that? And under every city. There's always places to hide, if you're clever. You can tunnel from

place to place, come and go as you please, and nobody knows. Nobody sees. Nobody hears. And you can lift the manhole covers, drag down what you want, and dispose of what's left without leaving any evidence. Oh, it's clever and no mistake, and we can thank the Master for it all."

I nodded. "You mean Varek," I said.

They howled at that, and the sound nearly tore my head in two as the echo hammered from the metal walls. They howled, and then they scabbled towards me in the darkness, but I ran. I ran and waded and crawled and swam through muck and filth, seeking an opening, seeking a light, seeking an escape from the world of death and darkness here below.

I found it, found it at last. The round metal lid above my head which led to safety. Safety and the cool darkness of a cellar. A chink of light guided me to a stairway and the door above. I came out into a kitchen, moved past to the bedroom, and peered through the door.

Edgar Allan Poe sat by the bedside and made strange motions with his slim white hands. Two doctors were in attendance, and all focussed their gaze on the apparition lying on the bed; the gaunt, skeletal countenance peered up from the pillows with glazed and glassy eyes.

The patient had white whiskers and incongruously black hair; outside of the animation in his eyes he might have passed for dead, and none would be the wiser.

But Poe's hands moved, commanding the sleeper to awake, and as I watched, he awakened.

Ejaculations of "Dead! dead!" absolutely burst from the tongue and not the lips of the sufferer, and his whole frame at once—within the space of a single minute or even less, shrunk—crumbled—absolutely rotted

away. Upon the bed, before that whole company, there lay a nearly liquid mass of loathsome, of detestable putridity.

THEN I fled, screaming, from the house of M. Valdemar.

But wherever I went, there were the dead.

Poe couldn't raise Valdemar. But Varek could. And he had. In my dream, I saw the proof. I tramped the streets of Chicago and recognized the faces. That stiff-lipped, unsmiling doorman in front of the ritzy Gold Coast hotel—he was dead. The black-haired girl on the end of the switchboard at the Merchandise Mart, the one who said, "Number please?" in such a mechanical fashion—she was Varek's puppet, too. There was an elevator operator at Field's and three men who worked the night shift at a big steel plant out near Gary. An old precinct sergeant over in Garfield Park was a walking corpse and even his wife didn't suspect. But what the precinct sergeant didn't know was that his captain was also a cadaver, and neither of them knew the secret of one of the Cook County judges.

The dead—there were hundreds of them. Maybe thousands. Because Chicago isn't the only city in the world, and Varek had been everywhere.

I walked along, and then I ran. Because I couldn't stand it any longer, couldn't stand to see the faces, the empty eyes. I couldn't stand being jostled by a corpse in the crowded Loop. I ran and I ran until I came to the Great Ahmed's house and I came up to the bedroom, battered down the locked door, and crawled in bed here with myself again, knowing that I was safe at last, I was here, I could wake up into a world of reality—*where dead men still walked!*

"And they have other powers, too."

Who had told me that? Varek himself, in the bartender's body. *Other powers*. Powers like levitation—like floating through space, through windows high off the ground...

It had happened once before in a dream, and now it was happening again.

I could see her face at the bedroom window. Vera's face. The pale blonde hair. The diamond choker. Floating outside the window, bumping against it. Her hands groped out. She was opening the window from outside.

Funny that I should see it that way, because I'd pulled the shade down, and it was up now. So was the window. She was coming into the room, floating in gently, softly, ever so quietly. And now she landed, without a bump or a thump or a shudder, on the tips of her delicate toes. She was dead, too, of course. I knew it now. Her stare was glassy. She moved by automatic compulsion only. It was like a hypnotic trance, with every motion directed by an outside, an alien force.

**G**LASSY-EYED, like a drugged Assassin. And like an Assassin, she drew the dagger from her waist. It was a long, slim, feminine-looking weapon, but it was deadly. The steel was diamond-bright. Why did she remind me of diamonds? Because of the choker. I gazed at the choker now as she tiptoed over to the bed. I wanted to watch it.

Better than watching the dagger. Because the dagger was a menace. It was coming up over my throat. In a moment it would come down, the point would bury itself in my neck, over the jugular.

All I had to do was watch the diamonds in her choker. And in a min-

ute it would be all over. The knife was coming down, the knife that would end my life, the knife that would make me one with Varek's army—the army of the dead.

It came down, fast.

The glitter of that frantically falling blade broke the spell. Instantaneously, I realized that I was seeing it. There was a knife, and it was coming down at my throat.

I jerked my head to one side on the pillow and slammed my body forward, upward. My hands closed around solid flesh. Cold flesh.

Vera LaValle twisted wildly in my arms.

I sat up, hands moving to her wrist. I pressed it back until the knife dropped to the carpet. She fought me silently, her face a Medusa's mask, blonde curls tumbling like serpents over her cold, bare shoulders.

Suddenly her head dropped. I caught a glimpse of strong white teeth grimacing towards my neck. Vampire teeth, seeking my jugular.

I tore at her throat. My hands ripped the choker, dug beneath it. It came free, and fell. My hands closed around her neck, then came away.

I could not touch the thin red line, the scar that encircled her neck completely.

My hands came away, and I slapped her, hard.

Abruptly, she sank to the bed. The glassiness left her eyes and something like recognition flooded her face.

"Where am I?" whispered Vera LaValle.

"In a bedroom on Brent Street," I answered. "The Great Ahmed's place. You floated through the window and tried to kill me."

"He put me under," she murmured. "Then he sent me here and levitated me. I didn't know."

I nodded, but said nothing.

"YOU BELIEVE me, don't you?" she implored. "I didn't know. He promised me that he'd never make me do that again. But he did. He always does. Even now, I can't trust him. He can do anything he likes with me, because I'm—"

She stopped abruptly, and I filled it in for her.

"Because you're dead," I told her. "I know."

Her eyes widened. "How did you find out!"

For answer, I pointed at her throat. She noticed then that the choker had been torn away. Her hands covered the red scar on her neck and she stared at me for a long moment. Then, with a sigh, she swept her hair back into place.

"Tell me about it," I said. "Maybe I can help."

"Nobody can help. Nobody."

"I can try. And the more you tell me, the more I have to work with. That is, if it's safe to talk."

She thought that one over for a moment. "Yes, it will be, for at least a half hour now. He goes into a sort of coma when he levitates one of us; it requires terrific concentration. But if he comes out of it and discovers I've failed, anything can happen."

The fear was coming back into her eyes, and I sought to capture her attention again, quickly.

"Half an hour," I said. "That's time enough. Tell me about it from the beginning. What happened to you?"

Vera LaValle sighed. Her hands stroked the scar, softly. "All right," she said.

I lighted a cigarette and sat up, offering her the pack. She shook her head and I said, "Oh, that's right, I remember now. You don't smoke, do you?"

"I can't," said Vera LaValle. "I haven't been able to smoke, or drink,

or eat. Not since I was beheaded—in 1794."

IN 1794, the Terror ruled France.

You could run into almost anything under the Terror. You might encounter a Citizen Robespierre or a man called—ironically enough—St. Just.

If you did so, the chances were that they would introduce you to still another man with a more apt name—Samson, the executioner.

And Samson, in turn, would direct you to La Guillotine.

Everybody in France knew La Guillotine. Despite the feminine appellation, La Guillotine was not a giddy female—although she turned a lot of heads.

La Guillotine was the Terror incarnate. The head-chopping Terror. The beheading blade that waited until you were ripe for it, then chopped and filled the basket beneath it with rich and rotting fruit.

In 1794, the Terror ruled France, and you might run into almost anything. If you were Vera LaValle, age 20, daughter of Lucien LaValle the wealthy merchant, you walked in constant danger of your life.

Wealthy merchants were not popular these days. Wealthy merchants had to twist and turn, fawn and cringe, resort to almost any stratagem in order to try and escape from Paris before the order came—the fatal summons to the Tribunal. Better to ride out of the city in a dung-cart than to the Place de la Concorde in a tumbril.

No wonder Lucien LaValle betook himself of desperate measures and consorted with strange people in an effort to procure a means of deliverance before it was too late. Paris was aswarm with rogues and adventurers, thieves and sharpers who fattened on the misery of the remaining members of the nobility or the



well-to-do. Some of them, for a price, could procure passports or arrange an unauthorized passage across the border or the English Channel.

Lucien LaValle, wealthy widower with a handsome, marriageable daughter, thought that he had found a solution.

Somewhere, somehow, in heaven knows what den or dive or stew, he encountered Nicolo Varek. Varek, the friend of the illustrious Comte St. Germain. Varek, the *confidante* of the mighty Cagliostro. Varek, the alchemist, the mystic, the seeker of the Philosopher's Stone. Varek who boasted of powers greater than those of the two great charlatans he claimed to have known—and taught. Varek, the unsmiling, the cold, the ageless. But—and this was the crux of the matter—Varek the foreigner. Varek, the holder of the priceless possession, the Russian visa. The passport to freedom for himself and family.

VAREK HAD no family, now. But Vera LaValle was young, she was *chic*, she was eminently well dowered. If she were a wife, and Lucien LaValle an official member of Varek's family—then what would there be to stop the *menage* from leaving France?

It was a reasonable proposition, and Lucien LaValle presented it to Varek on many occasions.

He shrugged. There was work to be done here in Paris, he said. Great things were afoot. He had never been presented to Mademoiselle LaValle, and no doubt she was all her fond father proclaimed her to be but still... A man in Varek's position is above matrimony and the calls of the flesh. And as to money (and here Varek shrugged again), he fortunately was in a position to command a fortune whenever he wished. No, it would not be advisable to leave

the country now. As a matter of fact, everything depended upon remaining.

Lucien LaValle was eloquent. When eloquence fell upon deaf ears, he was insistent. When insistence failed, he resorted to tears. He sank to his knees. He wept and implored. And in the end, Nicolo Varek consented to meet the merchant's daughter, to talk to her.

That was enough for LaValle. He returned home elated, and put his case to Vera.

"Consider now how much depends upon your conduct," he told her. "Be charming—sprightly—gay. This Varek, he has a long face. He needs cheering. He needs your youth."

Vera LaValle nodded dutifully. No need to instruct her in coquetry. Long before he revealed his hopes and plans, she was miles ahead of her father. He had found a man who could save them—at a price. What the price was did not matter. Her father would pay his share and she would gladly pay hers.

She bathed, dressed, perfumed and painted for the interview. The meeting took place in the parlor and it was unchaperoned. A carriage drove up in the dusk, and Vera LaValle met Nicolo Varek under candlelight.

And it was thus that Varek, the friend of the nobility, the mentor of magicians, the peer of alchemists—Varek, the man who was above matrimony or the commonplace emotional reactions of ordinary men—fell in love.

Candlelight and coquetry definitely won the day, and the night. The *sauve*, cold middle-aged man became a stammering, intense importuner. As to the matter of age, Varek was quite explicit on that point.

"Do not think of me as old, my dear," he reassured her. "For I am truly ageless. There are secrets I possess, secrets you shall share with

me. Oh, we will share a great deal, you and I!"

**H**E BEGAN to boast then, like any love-sick youth, and to confide.

Varek was Russian by birth, but the date of that birth and the details of his parentage would (he smirked) astound her. Suffice for him to say that he came of noble blood. He had been educated at the leading universities of Europe, but the bulk of his learning came from extended sojourns in Mongolia and Hindustan where he had studied occultism and the forbidden mysteries. Upon his return to Europe, he had visited Italy and imparted some of his wisdom to Cagliostro—wisdom which Cagliostro misused in his unscrupulous career. Varek, still seeking disciples, later gave instruction to the Comte de St. Germain, whose mastery of mass illusion and the principles of levitation enabled him to win fame and fortune.

But he, Varek, was not interested in such trivia. True, as an alchemist he had sought to transmute baser metals to gold. But he soon realized that cultivation of other powers was more important. Once he had developed them, fame and fortune would be his for the asking.

There were two secrets, and two only, which were worth possessing. One of them was the secret of eternal youth, and the other, the secret of eternal life.

To the discovery of these secrets, Varek had dedicated himself for scores of years.

It was a costly study, an expensive search. In order to finance himself he had, at times, resorted to base means. As an alchemist he was acquainted with the group that centered around La Vo'sin, and he admitted assisting that notorious female in her preparation of poisons. He had also been familiar with the clique surrounding the infamous de Montespan.

"But that was ages ago!" cried Vera, when she heard him. "Over a hundred years!"

Nicolo Varek, the unsmiling one, smiled. "Exactly," he said. "You see, I succeeded in at least part of my quest. I did discover the secret of eternal youth. Discovered it and possessed myself of it."

"You are over a hundred?" Vera murmured.

Varek inclined his head. "I assure you, time is a relative concept. You will not find me less ardent a lover due to my age, no less honorable a man because of my past associations. As you realize, we who seek the mysteries have always been on the fringes of society. We skulk in darkness, we consort with the underworld, we compound with the charlatans simply because we have never been accepted by the scholars and the savants. They are jealous of our achievements, these so-called "men of science"—although virtually all they know or hope to know has come from our work.

"Yes, it is we alchemists who have given them their chemistry, we sorcerers who have preserve dwhat little is known of medicine and physiology and biology, we mystics who have the only knowledge which can develop into a science of the mind."

"I don't understand," Vera said. "What are you trying to tell me?"

"I'm telling you not to be afraid of me," he answered. "It has been said that I am a cheat, a liar, a fraud, a scoundrel, a magician, a murderer. Very well—I am all these things, but to a purpose. That purpose is power, power greater than you can dream!

"I've played my part behind the scenes these years past, my dear—and you've seen the result! I've had my interview with Mademoiselle Charlotte Corday, and Marat died. I've talked to Citizen Robespierre's

brother, and Danton is no more. I've ways and means to pull the strings and make the puppets dance. And the end will be power. Great power. Once France is properly disrupted, there are other lands ripe for revolution.

"Revolution, my dear, always ends in dictatorship. Dictatorship, my dear, always ends in megalomania on the part of those who rule. And what would a megalomaniac do for the secret of eternal youth or the secret of eternal life—or both?"

"Ah, yes, it will end only one way: My way. I shall rule the rulers! Think of that, my dear. Within a few years, Nicolo Varek will be the unseen ruler of the world. And you, his empress, his queen."

VAREK CAME closer, and Vera could see the paper thinness of his bloodless lips. He might have been forty, he might have been four hundred. "The secret of eternal youth. How does that please you, my little one? To be always young, always as you are today? To live, to rule, to enjoy the senses to the full forever? I have that gift for you, that dowry.

"And soon—sooner than I dare tell you—I shall have the other, too. The Great Secret. Eternal life! I've a laboratory here—you must see it—where I experiment. In times like these, there is no shortage of subjects. Samson sells me the unclaimed ones every day." The bloodless lips formed a bloody smile. "I'm getting closer and closer to the solution," Varek told her. "And once it's gained, the world is mine. Ours!"

It was mawkish melodrama, but it was also naked nightmare. For the little lisping, whispering, sniggering creature came closer and closer, and then he was no longer braggart or stammerer but merely a lustful automaton. He pawed at Vera LaValle and

she endured his carrion breath upon her neck for a moment. But only for a moment. Then she wrenched free, and Varek, losing his balance, tumbled grotesquely to the floor.

Vera LaValle laughed.

She didn't refuse his offer of marriage. She didn't call him an old man, a liar, a murderer, a repulsive fool. She didn't do anything but laugh.

Her laugh said all those things.

Nicolo Varek rose, tugged at his ruffled clothing, and bowed coldly. "*Adieu*," he said. And left.

Vera LaValle waited. She waited for Lucien to scamper in, rubbing his hands briskly in anticipation. She waited for the effect of her story upon him; his crestfallen stare, his agitation, his frantic reiteration of, "Why, why, why? He was our only hope, our only chance! Why?"

She waited, then, for the summons. It came soon enough.

Somebody had denounced Citizen LaValle and his daughter. As usurers, as enemies of the People.

She waited for the trial, and it was short. Lucien sobbed when he heard the verdict, but she shrugged.

She waited, then, for the tumbril.

Waited, those last few days, alone. For Lucien LaValle hung himself one gloomy Sunday morning and she was left alone.

She was alone, and waiting, that last night when Varek came.

Citizens were not allowed to visit with prisoners in their cells on the eve of execution. But Varek was not a citizen. He was not a man at all in the ordinary concept of the word. He was a mocking shadow that glided silently to her cell.

ONE MOMENT nothing, and the next, Varek was there. Whispering in the darkness.

"Vera, Vera LaValle, listen to me! I have news for you. Great news!"

Silence, as he waited for a reply. But she said nothing. After a moment, he continued: "Remember what I told you? About the laboratory, the experiments, the secret of eternal life? I have it at last, Vera—I have it at last! Oh, it's not exactly all I'd hoped, and much remains to be done in refining the method. But it's the goal of sorcery through the ages, the dream of science. And I have it. For you. For us!"

Silence once more. Vera LaValle did not move. He spoke again: "Eternal life, Vera! I swear it's the truth; I can give you eternal life. All you need do is say the word and you're free. I can get you out as easily as I got you in. And now you can be young forever, alive forever! You must believe me, you must!"

Vera turned and faced him through the bars of the cell. She could not see his face in the darkness of the corridor, but he could see her countenance—and the lineaments of loathing.

"I do believe you," she said. "And I tell you that I prefer to die tomorrow morning rather than spend eternity—or a single living moment—with you."

Varek's laugh grated through the gloom. "A plain answer, Mademoiselle LaValle. But I wonder if you have rightly considered what's in store for you. When the tumbril rolls and the sun is gleaming, gleaming on the bright blade of the guillotine—Have you seen the heads in the basket, Mademoiselle? Have you seen Samson lift them by the hair and exhibit them to the crowd?"

"You can't frighten me," she whispered.

"Do you know what it's like to be dead? Dead forever and ever? They'll put you in the ground, Mademoiselle, in the cold wet ground. You'll lie there in eternal darkness,

lie there and rot and decay into slime and dust. And the lips that you withhold from me will feed kisses to the worms.

"Aren't you afraid of death, Mademoiselle LaValle?"

She shook her head and smiled into the blackness beyond the bars. "Not as much as I fear life with you," she said. "Now, go and leave me in peace."

He broke down, then. The creature cried and begged. "I don't understand, it's never happened before—that a woman, a girl, a mere child should do this to me! I thought I was immune to folly, but since the moment I laid eyes on you I cannot endure the thought of not possessing you. You are a burning in my blood, you must know that, and you cannot refuse—you cannot! But you must be mine of your own free will, not by force. I want you willingly, and I must have you." Varek sobbed, and it was the dry and dusty sobbing of a re-animated mummy, rustling in the darkness.

Once again, Vera LaValle shook her head. "No," she said.

VAREK'S SOB held not grief but rage. "Good enough," he cried. "If I'm not fit for you, I commend you to a new lover. To Death! Death shall embrace you, twine his bony fingers in your curls, take your head as a souvenir of his conquest. *Adieu*—I leave you to hold tryst with your beloved. He'll not be long now!"

And he left her.

Then and only then did Vera break down. For she had lied. She did fear death. The thought of dying terrified her past all comprehension, and now in the darkness she could almost see the grinning presence of Death incarnate; the skeleton in the black cloak, the grinning skull covered with a cowl.

He was still with her the next morning, when the guards came. He walked with her to the tumbril, and as she and five other weeping and be-draggled women took their places, Death climbed in beside them.

Death grinned at Vera LaValle as she rode through the streets of Paris to the site of execution. Death pointed his finger at the roaring crowd, the prancing Citizen Samson and his grimacing assistants. Death showed her the shrieking silhouette of the knife against the dawn-drenched sky.

Death was with her as she walked to the platform. Death helped her up the stairs, and it seemed to Vera in the delirium of the last few moments that not Samson but Death himself was the executioner—removing her cloak, binding her arms, forcing her to kneel and gaze down at the bottom of the basket when all the time she wanted to gaze up; gaze up at the knife, the bright blade of the knife which was the only real thing left in the world.

Then, as the roar of the crowd came up, the blade of the guillotine came down.

Death took Vera LaValle in his arms.

And—released her!

"You want to know what it's like, of course," she told me, sitting there on the bed, thousands of miles and lifetimes later. "But I don't remember. There was no pain, no sensation, and yet I *felt*, I was conscious in a new way. There was no sense of duration, either.

"Then the pain came back, and I was alive.

"I had this pain in the throat, and in the head.

"I opened my eyes. I saw the bandage on my neck. I saw the silver tube coiling to the top of my spine. And I saw Varek.

"You know what happened, of

course. Samson had sold me to Varek after the execution. He took me to his laboratory and brought me back to life.

"I realized it, naturally, at once. But I can never convey to you the horror of that moment—when I discovered that he had sewed my head back on my body!

"It was grotesque, it was ludicrous, and it was somehow blasphemous. But despite it all, in the weeks to come, I learned to respect the power, the wisdom, the genius of Nicolo Varek.

"My convalescence, if you can call it that, was slow. It was not easy, with the crude techniques he had painfully evolved, for Varek to keep me alive and nurse me back to a semblance of health and sanity. But he did it. Since that time I've learned a great deal about what he does to re-animate the dead, and still I haven't grasped the true secret."

**S**HE PAUSED, and I cut in: "You say he sewed your head back on? But that's...incredible."

Vera pointed at the scar and smiled wanly. "Would you find it equally incredible if I told you that there's a metal plate covering half of my skull—that there is metal, some sort of machinery, extending down the neck and into the upper spine? That Varek, in 1794, was using electrical voltage and a sort of miniature dynamo for metabolic regulation? That the control he exercised and still exercises is a combination of hypnotism and an extension of brain-waves transformed into electric current? Yet it's true, all of it. I am an automaton—operating on the power generated from within plus the current fed me by Varek, at a distance. I'm alive yet not alive. I do not age or change, I do not eat or sleep. But there's something worse than sleep.

Something much worse." She shuddered. "That's when he *turns me off*."

Either she was crazy or I was. Or both of us. This I knew. But I believed her. I believed the cold-eyed, cold-skinned creature with the livid scar who talked to me across the centuries.

"He's done it to me, many times, temporarily and to suit his convenience or his needs. But I've seen him do it to others—permanently. It's horrible. They die, then; die a second death. A hideous death, forever.

"That's the hold he has over me, over all of us. The ability to turn us off. Because there's something inside that wants to live, fights to live. Oh, how can I tell you the story of what took a hundred and sixty years to live?" Vera glanced around the room, and for a moment her agitation seemed completely human. "There's not time; he'll come out of it now, hear us."

I pressed her. I had to know the rest. "Quickly, then," I urged. "What happened after you recovered?"

"He was still experimenting. I was his first complete success. There were other...corpses...that he revived temporarily. But they were damaged, warped. Completely insane. At the time, he hadn't perfected his methodology of control. Several escaped. There was an ugly scandal. And Robespierre's dictatorship fell. He went to the guillotine himself. Varek no longer had protection in Paris. So we fled.

"The Embargo was on, and the only ship we could find was bound for the colonies. We ended up in Haiti, just the two of us.

"It was a strange relationship. He no longer desired me, of course—and I think he almost regretted his monstrous act of revival. Gradually he set about to make me his servant. And of

course, he succeeded. I was alone, helpless, literally dependent on him for my existence.

"I offer no apologies for serving Varek. I had no choice. And he was master.

"It didn't take long for him to establish himself in Haiti and in San Domingo. He had brought money and jewels. We took a mansion; he posed as a planter. And immediately set about fomenting an insurrection. You know what happened to Haiti a few years later, when Touissant L'Ouverture, Dessalines and Christophe revolted against the French. Varek played his part. Blood flowed, and there were bodies for Varek's new laboratories. Black bodies to experiment upon. Black bodies to toil on the plantations.

"It was at this time that a new superstition arose. The one about zombies. The walking dead. Can you understand now just why and how this belief was born?"

**I** NODDED, thinking of my dreams.

There was a horrid logic and conviction behind her words. Varek had created the concept of the zombie. His creatures walking the world.

"The blacks were primitive, simple. Varek bungled often. He was still groping, evolving methods and techniques. The botched jobs were the zombies.

"And the vampires—that was Hungary, of course."

I raised an eyebrow. "But Varek isn't responsible for the belief in vampires. That's an ancient superstition."

"Correct," answered Vera. "But we went to Hungary from Haiti because of the belief. Because, there, tales of the walking dead would be ascribed to superstition and no one would investigate too closely if some of Varek's experiments moved freely over the countryside. Also, Varek

wished to follow the latest developments in European scientific research. Even before the Revolution, he had worked briefly with Anton Mesmer in the development of hypnotism. Now he was interested in the new psychology.

"You see, attaining the power he dreams of is a long and a complicated process. It involves much more than merely the ability to control the reanimated bodies of the dead. At first, Varek could not keep a corpse alive except by constant hypnotic control. He had to focus his own energies every moment. Then he reached a stage where he could fix a behavior pattern for hours, or days, and turn to other matters. But that is not enough.

"Each reanimated corpse must be provided for—given a new identity, a new life, a new *role* to play. Varek moulds the puppets, breathes life into them, and then he must manipulate the strings. Dozens, scores of puppets, on dozens of separate stages; all play their part in one involved drama.

"He had to enter into scientific fields, enter into politics. How much of the intrigue behind the Third Empire in France was due to his work, I'll never know. For in 1847 I rebelled; I tried to get away. And as punishment he *turned me off for seventy years!*"

Vera's white death-mask contorted in remembered agony. "For seventy years I followed Varek across the world as baggage—in an ice-packed coffin. And meanwhile he meddled with science, he pulled strings, and he waited. What's time to Varek?

"I awoke in Russia, during the Revolution. By this time he'd come to realize that he needed living allies; men to work in front of the public. Dupes and spies. He'd made some connection with a monk, Rasputin. There was a plan to kill the young

Tsarevitch and then bring him back to life again; the Czar and Czarina would be at his mercy, from that point on. But somebody murdered Rasputin, and we fled Russia for a spell. That's when I was reanimated again.

"Varek believes in Revolution, you know. A time of turmoil and disruption is what he needs; it gives him an opportunity to profit by confusion. New and untried leaders arise, and he comes to them with hints of what he can do. He presents plans and attempts to gain control of those who form governments.

"We returned to Russia, and I aided him. I had no choice. It was that or lying in darkness—refrigerated darkness, now, thanks to modern conveniences." She smiled wryly. "You can guess what he's been up to since then. You can guess who was behind the scenes in some of Pavlov's experiments. Varek reached members of that group. You can guess that sooner or later the Comintern got wind of it. But what you do not know—and what history does not show—is just how perilously close Russia came to developing a truly mechanized army in the 1930's. An army of the dead!"

**I** LIT A cigarette and tried not to look at the clock on the bureau; the clock that was ticking the minutes away.

"We were in Germany, then, and Varek attempted to sell his notion to the New Order. But his spokesmen fell out of power, and in 1939 we fled again. We were in Canada for a few years, in Manitoba and further north. Varek waited out the war. But he has infinite patience, infinite cunning.

"He can afford to wait—wait for centuries, if necessary. He's a strange man, Varek. He has possessed vast wealth, and lost it time and time again



fleeing from country to country. He has a chameleon-like ability to alter his personality his appearance. He is— But what's the use of telling you? You're doomed."

I crushed out the cigarette.

"Now let's get down to cases," I suggested. "He sent you to kill me. Why?"

"Because you know about Cono. His offer was genuine, at first. He is still looking for a man, for many men, who will serve him as living allies. But you refused, and because you understand his power, you must die."

"Yet, Cono is such an insignificant cog in his machine," I persisted. "A dumb strong-man from a carnival. I can't see why a man with Varek's gigantic plans would bother with such a trivial matter."

"Then you don't know Varek. He has plans within plans. He's not lived quietly for the past few years for nothing. He's been waiting—waiting for the next war. The big one. The one his plans have indirectly foreshadowed."

"There's a great laboratory set up already, somewhere in Sonora. It is capable of...processing...the dead almost on a factory assembly line. Its services will be offered to the highest bidder when the time comes. Which ever side runs out of manpower and needs a new army of workers, a new army of fighters. Don't you understand? That's where it all leads to, Varek's dream; to create a world run by slaves—by the dead!"

"He'll never get away with it."

"I'm not so sure. The past few years have brought the scientific developments he needs. There are new methods of controlling bodies *en masse*. Radio, electronics, blood plasma all play a part in his schemes."

"For years now he's been in the background, waiting for the right time. When war comes he will have

emissaries ready to approach the new leaders. He knows how to get to the wealthy, the powerful, and intrigue them. That has been my job in the past. He intended to have your help, too—and probably the help of a hundred men like you."

"That's the one point that isn't clear to me yet," I told her. "Just exactly how does he manage to insinuate himself into the confidence of the men on top?"

VERA SMILED. The ghost of a smile, the smile of a ghost. "Simple. Have you ever heard of the Fox sisters? Or D.D. Home or Angel Annie or Madame Blavatsky?"

I nodded. "Spiritualist mediums or mystics, weren't they?"

"Yes. During my... sleep... Varek was able to hit on that gambit. The same one used earlier by St. Germain and Cagliostro. Through the ages the wealthy, the powerful have always had one weakness. A belief in superstition. A longing to pierce the veil of the Mysteries. They've always followed the seers, flocked to the occultists, confided in them. No need to explain the phenomenon. It exists."

"True enough," I said. "So Varek allies himself with the mediums. They act as his front men. They attract the rich. And Varek watches, waits, chooses those he wants or can use, and then steps into the picture and reveals his plans."

"Exactly." Vera sighed. "It was that way with Rasputin, if you remember. He was the key to the Czar's influence. And he's ready to start again."

"But the mediums aren't trustworthy, many are frauds," I argued.

"And many are not. Take D.D. Home, for example. No less a scientist than Crookes verified the fact that Home levitated himself out of a third storey window and floated back

in through another. It actually happened, time and time again. But what Crookes didn't know is that little, tubercular, wan Mr. Home had been dead for a year—and Varek animated him, hypnotized him, and then levitated him by concentration. Just as he levitated me tonight and sent me to kill you."

Vera paused. I stared at her white face in the gloom. And as I stared, something happened. A spasm contorted her countenance, the same dreadful tic that had afflicted Cono. I watched her as her mouth opened and a voice came out. But it was not Vera LaValle's voice. It was the voice of the dead bartender, the voice of Varek.

"Yes," it told her, as much as it told me. "I sent you to kill him. And you failed. Failed and then talked. I cannot afford to have you talk any more, Vera. I'm going to turn you off. *Forever.*"

The voice shut off abruptly. It had to shut off, for there was no longer a means of utterance. The spasm in Vera's face swept down over her body in a single hideous horripilation. For a moment she swayed there, shuddering convulsively. Then—she *melted*.

There was a change, and it wasn't a collapse. It was a running together, as though flesh were falling in on splintering bone. She shrank, dwindled before my eyes—and then she crumbled.

Somebody had taken the wax doll that was Vera LaValle, and held it over a roaring flame. In an instant she ran together, fused.

I stared at the floor, stared at the heap of fine white ash surrounding a charred and twisted cluster of wires linked to a metal plate.

Vera LaValle was gone.

If I'd had any doubts about Varek's power, they were gone now. They'd vanished with Vera, and taken a part of my sanity with them.

Let's face it; I was panicked. Varek knew where I was, and that meant I would no longer be safe here. Not safe from him, not safe from the police. I wondered what had happened to Ahmed. For all I knew, Varek had attended to him, too. And I couldn't stick around and wait.

I went over to the door. It was locked, of course, and I'd have to force it. I gave it the old college try. You see them do it every day in the movies and on television. Brawny, broad-chested hero puts his shoulder to the locked door. The door gives way. Simple.

Try it sometime. Desperate as I was, all I managed to gain was a bruised shoulder. Then I picked up a chair. That was a better deal. The panel splintered. I broke the lock.

Then I was running down the hall in darkness, groping at the head of the stairs, clumping down them, racing through the hall to the front door. If a cleaning-woman had showed up, she didn't show.

I made the door, opened it. The night air hit me. So did a hand.

"What's the rush, friend?"

I gasped with panic, then with relief.

Ahmed hustled in, rubbing his hands. "Hold it," he said. "I've got news for you."

I shook my head. "I've got news for you, too," I said.

"What do you mean?"

I decided to risk it. He had to be shown. I took him by the arm and steered him back up the stairs. If you think it wasn't hard for me to force myself into that room again, you've got another guess. But it had to be done that way.

**V**ERA WAS gone and I was alone in the bedroom. Or was I?

"Take a look," I said.

His little gray eyes examined the charred ashes on the floor. He stooped and picked up the metal plate, contemplated the dangling wires protruding from it.

"What's this?"

"All that remains of Vera LaValle. She visited me with a knife. I got her to talk and then she was... shut off."

"I don't follow you."

"Sit down," I sighed. "I'll have to explain, but I want to make it fast."

**I** DID. The Great Ahmed nodded.

He wasn't upset, he wasn't alarmed, he wasn't horrified. Somehow, his very calmness managed to reassure me.

"It ties together," he said, as I concluded. "It fits. Every bit of it."

"How do you know?"

"Because I've seen Cono. You were right about the hotel, friend. He came back. And when he found me hiding in the closet he tried to kill me." Ahmed smiled and held up a skeleton key. "I needn't tell you how I got in the room," he grinned. "But to make a long story short, the same thing happened as must have happened to you and Vera here. I managed to calm him down—he recognized me, of course. To be brutally frank, I resorted to an old Varek trick; a little hypnosis of my own. Varek must have been directing his own energies elsewhere, possibly to levitate Vera LaValle.

"At any rate, Cono talked. Of course, he's newly reborn, as it were, and he doesn't have too many details. Also, he's not the best example of a scientific mind." Ahmed smiled, briefly. "Still, he told more than he thought he was telling.

"Did you know that Varek has hideouts established in almost every principal city in the world? And that each of them contains anywhere from

a dozen to several hundred bodies under refrigeration, ready for reanimation at any time? A sort of dead storage.

"Also, there are the walkers. More of them than you'd suspect. Although it's really quite easy to detect them because they all have one thing in common—the red scar on the neck."

I started at that. "You mean, he cuts off their heads before he revives them?"

Ahmed shrugged. "Not completely, now. But an operation is performed. A deep incision is made at the base of the brain. The metal plate is grafted into place and the wires"—here he picked up the charred mass from the floor and waved it—"are put into place. Meanwhile, the hypnotic control is being established."

"It's a form of hypnotism, then? But I don't get it."

The Great Ahmed shook his head. "It isn't easy. But then, what do any of us understand about the life process? We don't know what governs our physiological continuity; makes our hearts beat and our lungs take in and expel air without conscious control. You might say we operate our own bodies through autohypnosis and that keeps us alive.

"And what's death? Various organs 'die' at different times after the heart stops. We can understand the process of decay, but we can't define or truly measure death. Why, I defy anyone to tell me exactly what sleep is, let alone death!

"Sleep—that's a form of hypnosis, too.

"And, somehow, Varek has harnessed that portion of the mind which functions automatically in life, in sleep; kept it going in the state we describe as death. The common denominator is electrical energy; brainwaves, which can be measured electrically, you know. Varek has man-

aged to apply hypnotic principles to the electric current of the body; magnetism controlling magnetism. That's why he performs the operation, inserts the metal plates in the brain and the spine. To alter the 'hookup', you might say."

THE LITTLE man spoke earnestly, as though he were lecturing a backward pupil. I listened with equal earnestness now as he waved his finger at me.

"Let me put it simply. You might compare the human body to a radio set, and Varek to a radio station. His operation consists of putting in the proper tubes and condensers to make the set forever receptive to his hypnotic wave-length. It's all electrical. Once control is established, he can broadcast impulses forever. That's a vast oversimplification, but you get the idea."

"Not completely," I said. "What about the bartender?"

"Oh, there are exceptions. The bartender was one. There Varek resorted to a temporary hookup. Probably gave his entire concentration to animating him temporarily, just to talk to you. As he concentrated entirely to levitate Vera. Those special things require special efforts. But with the vast army of dead, Varek—to return to our little analogy of a radio station—merely sends out a host of previously prepared 'transcriptions' in the shape of hypnotic suggestions. The dead then 'play' the hypnotic suggestions through for hours. And Varek need pay no more attention to them than an engineer who puts on long-playing records for broadcasting. They operate automatically.

"And that, of course, is the weakness. Sometimes Varek doesn't pay attention; or he watches the wrong body. Then it's possible for someone else with a stronger hypnotic wave-

length to 'jam' reception in a corpse—capture its attention, divert its purpose. As I did with Cono tonight at the hotel. And as you did with Vera."

"Lucky for both of us we did," I said. "But what else happened? What else did you find out? Why is Varek operating in Chicago now? And—this is the jackpot question—what's the secret of his own eternal life?"

The Great Ahmed smiled. "You want a lot for a few hours' work, friend," he answered gently. "Some of those questions you'll have to find out about for yourself. All I can do is give you that opportunity."

"Meaning?"

"Meaning I made a deal with Cono. And I think he can be trusted—as long as Varek doesn't get to him. Cono has promised to lead you direct to Varek himself tonight."

"Now?" I was genuinely startled.

Ahmed glanced at his wristwatch. "In about three quarters of an hour. You're to meet him in the lobby of the Wrigley Building at eleven-thirty. Alone."

I didn't like that at all, and he could see it even before I spoke. "What's the big idea?" I asked. "Why aren't you coming along?"

The little man returned my gaze with unmovable composure. "For a very obvious reason; it might be a trap. Then Varek'd have both of us. As it is, you'll have to take your chances. And if anything does go wrong, I'll still be able to carry on, to follow through. After all, that's why you hired me. And I aim to finish the job."

HE WAS silent for a moment.

"Think it over," he said. "You don't have to go, you know. And I don't mind telling you I'd hesitate before taking such a risk."

I nodded. "Somebody's got to do it," I said. "So if you'll call a cab for

me..."

Ahmed smiled and held out his hand. "Good boy," he said. He turned and led the way downstairs. He phoned for a cab in the hall.

"I don't know where you're going or what you'll get into," he mused. "And of course, under the circumstances, you can't have the cops tagging along. You'll just have to use your head. Try and keep in touch with me, tip me off what's going on and what to do."

"Why don't you follow me in another cab?" I suggested. "Then, no matter where Cono takes me, you'll at least have the address."

"Good idea." Ahmed stepped to the phone and put in another call. Then he nudged me. "And here's a little idea of my own," he said.

He held out his hand next to my pocket and dumped something cold and hard. I reached for it and came up with a .38, fully loaded.

"Just in case," he told me. "I'll feel better if you have something along for company."

I grinned my gratitude as we walked out of the door of 43 East Brent and waited for the cabs to arrive. Mine rolled up first, but his turned the corner a moment later.

"Let's go," he said. "Be careful now."

"Same to you," I answered. Then, "Wrigley Building," I told the driver. And we were off.

It was a nice, warm, moonless night. I leaned back in the cab as we jolted downtown and tried to relax. I'll give you three guesses how well I succeeded.

We kept stopping at corners, corners with cops on them. I hid my face and thanked my lucky stars there was no moon.

WHEN WE hit Chicago Avenue and a red light, I took a long

chance. I leaned out of the cab, yelled at a newsboy, and bought a paper. Just idle curiosity. I wanted to see if they had my picture in today. With some of the latest gossip. Such as the offering of a reward, dead or alive.

I riffled through the pages rapidly, but no success greeted my efforts. Maybe they didn't care. Maybe they were used to killing bartenders in Chicago.

Killing—

The little squib caught my eye. With the Louisville dateline. James T. Armstrong Shows... Louis Preusser, 43... Confessed murderer of... Psychiatrists declared under influence of hypnosis and drugs...

It was the follow-up on the story of Louie's confession. He'd walked in, glassy-eyed, and confessed. I wondered what the whole deal was. The Great Ahmed would know. Maybe I'd better ask him before I went on.

I glanced behind to see if his cab was trailing mine. Nothing was in sight. Maybe his driver had taken Clark Street instead. He'd catch up to me. Nobody seemed to have any trouble at all catching up to me whenever they wanted to.

Take Vera LaValle, for instance. She'd found me at the Great Ahmed's after I'd been there for less than an hour. That was one question I needed an answer for. How did she—and Varek—know I was there?

I'd remember to ask Ahmed that.

But—*would he tell me?*

Maybe you're a scientist, a great scientist. Maybe you're a sorcerer too, a wizard. You can raise the dead, and you stay alive yourself. But it's still quite a trick to pick one person out of four million and send a killer right to his door. Unless somebody tips you off.

*The tipoff.* That was it.

Ahmed goes out. Ahmed sells out.

Of course! He went to the hotel, just as he said he would, with the eight grand in his pocket. Maybe he saw Cono there, maybe he saw somebody else. Maybe he even saw Varek himself. And he made a deal. He told Varek where I was. Varek sent Vera to kill me.

When enough time had passed, Ahmed came back to see if the job was accomplished. It must have surprised him to find me alive.

So he came up with the story about meeting Cono. Why? It hadn't, come to think of it, sounded too good at the time. This business about winning Cono over with hypnosis. And Cono leading me to Varek.

But seeing me alive, he'd told me the story for a purpose. Ahmed was a great guy for purposes, all right. He must even have given me the gun for a purpose.

I tried to figure it out as we roared down Michigan. I could see the gleaming lighted spire that chewing gum built, right ahead. I'd be there in a minute now.

What had Varek said? Something about not bothering to kill me because the law would do it.

**A**ND HERE I came riding up to the Wrigley building, with a gun in my pocket. An armed murderer.

I knew what to look for now. It wouldn't be Ahmed's cab; he wouldn't show up at all, I was sure. I was looking for a black prowler car.

I wouldn't see Cono standing in the lobby with a white carnation in his buttonhole, ready to guide me on a conducted tour of Varek's snug harbor. I was more likely to see a couple of downtown boys with their hands in their topcoat pockets. The reception committee from the downtown station.

We started to edge towards the curb, and I added up my score. Ex-

actly 100 per cent right. There was the squad car, there were the boys. They stood patiently, just waiting for somebody to show up. If I knew Ahmed, I felt sure he'd furnish them with a very good description.

We nosed in, slowing down. "Here we are—" the driver began.

"No, we're not," I cut in. "Back to 43 East Brent. And fast. I have another appointment."

We kept going, over the bridge. Nobody looked up. Nobody followed. I kept my hand on the butt of the .38 all the way back. I didn't want to lose it, you see.

It was the Great Ahmed's, and I intended to make sure that I gave it to him.

**T**HE HOUSE was dark, but then it was always dark. I had the cab park around the corner because I didn't mind walking. In fact, I preferred it. Preferred it so much I went around to the back of the house—the long way around, mind you. Didn't bother me a bit. Nor did it bother me to climb in through a rear bedroom window on the first floor.

I was quiet. Very quiet. Sort of a slow, seething quiet. Little thoughts kept bubbling up in me about what I'd do to Ahmed when I got my hands on him.

So he wasn't the type for a carney grifter, eh? Well, he'd taken me in soon enough. And sold me out even sooner.

I landed on the bedroom floor and padded out, down the hall. No cleaning-woman was around and I knew now that there never had been. Ahmed had locked me in to keep me on ice for Vera LaValle or whoever Varek might send.

Ahmed and Varek—a good team. Maybe Ahmed was the guy Varek needed for a front man!

Of course, he wouldn't look quite

so presentable after I got through with him....

I tiptoed down the hall, peeked into the library. It was dark. The whole house was dark. I stopped, listened. After a long moment, I became convinced of the truth. I was alone. Ahmed had gone out in his cab but he hadn't returned.

I reached a stairway going up—that led to the bedroom and the other rooms on the second floor. But behind it was another set of stairs, going down. I decided to have myself a look. Curiosity killed a cat of course—but *this* cat carried a .38.

The basement was big and dusty. Old fashioned furnace, the usual stationary washtubs, a coal-bin, a fruit-cellar. I pushed open the door and stared at the usual assortment of dusty, empty jars in the light thrown by a naked bulb dangling from the center of the small room.

Nothing in the cellar to interest me. My hunch was cold.

I was cold!

Standing in the deserted fruit-cellar a little past midnight of a warm May evening, I was cold. Cold as ice! I felt the cold air all around me. But where was it coming from?

A draft blew against my trouser cuffs. I looked down.

There was a round metal lid set in the floor of the fruit-cellar. I stooped, touched it. The iron was icy. I groped for the ring, lifted the lid. I gazed down into darkness.

Then I walked away, making a circuit of the cellar until I found what I needed and expected to find—the inevitable handy flashlight.

I returned to the fruit-cellar and pointed the beam down. It focussed on the iron rungs of a ladder. I took the flashlight in one hand, the gun in the other, and left enough fingers free on both for me to cling to the rungs as I descended.

I lowered myself into icy cold—the coldness of a vast black refrigerator. I went down, down, rung after rung. Finally my feet hit slimy, damp stone. I joggled the flashlight until it bisected a wall with its beams. Eventually I located a light switch.

I flicked it. The light went on, and I saw everything.

I was standing in the center of Varek's laboratory.

Varek—Ahmed, Ahmed—Varek.

It all added up now.

More lights went on.

THEY WENT on in the little room with the big filing cabinets. I pried open a lot of drawers that night; the drawers containing the certificates, the visas, the affidavits, the fake credentials, the diplomas, the letters of identity (hadn't Varek convinced the warden he was Cono's cousin?) and all of the mingled memorabilia of hundreds of years of impersonations, imposture, and disguise. Floods, tons of paper. The dust fairly flew.

And more light was shed. I found the long closet with the wardrobe; the Ahmed wardrobe, the sportsman's garments, the shabby workman's garb complete even to the battered tin initialled lunchbox and the union button. The accoutrements of Varek the wealthy man of the world were there, too—and a box containing diamonds and other gems that reminded me of poor Vera LaValle.

Then there was another room, with more files. Letters and newspaper clippings. Ads from the *Personal* columns of ten thousand papers, in a score of languages. *Help Wanted* notices. Lonely Hearts messages. And letters, letters, letters—messages from the millions who later turned up missing. Those who answered Varek's appeal for a wife, a husband, an employee. I got a picture of him sitting



there, year after year, sending out his letters, interviewing prospects, recruits for his army of the dead. Recruits who would not be missed, searched for.

There were more lights in other rooms. The big surgery, with the gigantic autoclave; completely modern, completely equipped. I wondered how he'd managed to assemble it here, and then I thought of the dead; the tireless dead who steal, who strain, who slave day and night.

Beyond the modern surgery was medieval horror.

The round, dungeon-like room, dominated by the huge table on which rested the alembics and retorts of an ancient alchemist. The beaker filled with the brownish-red, crusting liquid. The herbs and powders on the shelves; the dried roots in bottles, and the great jars filled with monkeys floating in a nauseous liquid, and other things that looked like monkeys but weren't. The stock of chalk and powders. The great circle drawn upon the floor with the zodiacal signs inscribed in blue before it. The jar of combustible powder—that was used to make the circle of fire inside a pentagon, according to the thaumaturgists. And on the iron table rested the iron book; the *Grimoire* of the sorcerer.

**S**ORCERY AND science! Surgery and Satanism! That was the link, the combination! Sorcery had led to science, as Varek said. His original alchemic experiments had brought him to actual research and enabled him to perfect his method of reanimating the dead.

But that didn't explain his own continued life, his boasts of eternal youth. That was sorcery. That was selling your soul, after lighting the fires and invoking the Author of All Evil.

The rooms, the lighted rooms,

seemed to present a panorama of Varek's entire existence across the centuries. Everything was here—and I wondered, now, if he'd told me the truth. If in every great city, unsuspected, beneath a house or a factory or a tenement there existed a duplicate of this place. What had he said? A sort of "dead storage", that was it.

"Dead storage." But where were the dead?

There was another room, beyond the alchemic chamber. I entered it, and the coldness engulfed me. This was *it*. The refrigerator storage space. Where you keep the cold meat.

The cold meat...

They lay on slabs, but they weren't sheeted. I could see them all, see their staring faces. Men, women, children, young, old, rich, poor—lavish your categories upon them, they were all here. A host, a hundred or more. Silent but not sleeping, inert but not immovable, rigid without *rigor*. They lay there, waiting, like toys that would soon be wound up by cunning hands and set about to walk in make-belief of life.

It was cold in that room, but cold alone did not make me shiver. I walked through rows of dead, staring into the faces that stared into mine. I don't know what I expected to see. None of them looked familiar—except, perhaps one little blonde who reminded me of someone I'd run into before somewhere.

Then, all at once, I knew what I must do. There was fire outside, and it would serve more purposes than that of conjuring up demons. It could also be used to put them to rest.

I walked back into the other room and picked up the powder box which, when its contents were kindled, traced a pattern of flame on the floor. A circle of fire protected you from demons, it was said, after you evoked

them.

I ripped the lid off the box and began to sprinkle the powder about. I worked quickly, but not quickly enough.

Because when I looked up, somebody was standing in the room. He only stood there for a moment, and then he started for me.

It was Cono.

**H**E DIDN'T say anything and I didn't say anything. He came on and I backed away. The cold arms reached out; I'd felt them before. The tic-like grimace leered, and I knew it would keep on leering no matter how many bullets I might waste.

Because the dead don't die.

Because this was the end.

Because he was coming at me like a demon.

But demons can be warded off with fire.

I pulled out the .38 and pressed the trigger. I didn't aim at Cono; I aimed at the powder on the floor.

A circle of flame shot up, almost in Cono's face. He stopped. Dead or alive, fire destroys flesh. And he couldn't get through. Not as long as the fire flared.

I wondered how long that would be. When would the powder's potency be exhausted? Ten minutes, five, two? Whatever the time, I had that long to live and no longer—unless I could convince him.

I talked then. Told him what I thought he'd understand. About Varek being the Great Ahmed, hiding out with the carney for a while and perfecting plans. About seeing Cono and deciding to make him a recruit, then rigging up the murder charge by hypnotizing Louie, getting him to drug Cono and kill Flo.

I told him something about what Varek was, what he planned, what he'd do to Cono, to me, to the whole

world if he wasn't stopped and stopped soon. I told him about the sorcery and the science and the bodies that walked everywhere in every city.

The fire began to flicker, to fade, to die down. I talked louder, faster. And it didn't do any good.

It was like talking to a stone wall.

*It was like talking to a dead man.*

With a sickening feeling, I realized I'd been in this spot once before. I'd tried then, tried to tell Cono I was his friend, tried to reach his heart, his soul. But dead men have no hearts. Varek was his heart. And I knew of nothing that could touch his soul. Nothing he cared for, nothing he loved. Except Flo!

Then I remembered, remembered the next room and the blonde on the slab. The little blonde with the familiar face—Flo!

"Cono," I said. "Listen to me. You've got to listen. She's in there, too. You didn't know that, did you? He didn't tell you. But he's greedy, he wants them all. He not only took your body, he took Flo's too. She's in the next room, Cono. He cut off her head, put in his damned wires and plates, and now she'll walk for him forever!

He was blind. Blind and deaf. The flames died, he moved towards me, he caught me up in his arms. I waited for the squeezing strength of his fingers to wrench my life away. But he merely held me, held me and lumbered across the ashes into the next room.

"Show me where," he said, and the tic rippled horribly across his face.

I pointed. Pointed at the face I remembered from a photograph he'd shown me.

Cono saw her. He released me, and his hands went to his head. He kept staring at her, staring and staring, even after Varek came into the room.

**T**HAT'S HOW it happened. One second we were alone and the next moment he was there—little gray shadow, silent and suave.

No emotion, no surprise, no tension.

Just his soft, quiet voice saying, "Kill him, Cono."

He might have been asking the big man for a match.

But as I stared at Varek—stared at the quiet little middle-aged man with the paper-thin lips—I saw many things.

I saw a vulgar charlatan in a carnival who was in turn a gypsy in Spain who was in turn a Polish count who was in turn a Haitian planter who was a London barrister who was a Polynesian trader who was a Tulsa wildcatter who was a physician in Cairo who was a trapper with Jim Bridger who was a diplomat of Austria who was—it went on and on that way, a hundred incarnations and a hundred lives and all of them were evil.

He faced us with all of that evil, the evil of a hundred and a thousand men, concentrated but quietly so, and he said to Cono again in the voice that could not be denied because it was the voice of mastery, the voice of life over death—"Kill him, Cono."

Cono set me down and I felt his arms close about my body, his hands grasp my throat. He was a robot, an automaton, he could not refuse; he was a zombie, vampire, all the evil legends, all the fear of the dead that return, the dead that never die.

Cono bent me back. And Varek, with a look in his eyes that was a gray ecstasy, came closer and waited for Cono to finish.

That's what Cono wanted, too.

For when Varek came close, Cono moved. One instant he held me—the next, I was free and those huge arms had reached out to engulf Varek.

The little gray man rose, shrieking, in the air. Cono squeezed—there was a sound like somebody stepping on a thin board—and the body of Varek writhed and twisted on the floor like a snake with a broken back.

Cono helped me with the powder, then. There were chemicals, too; enough to start a good-sized blaze.

"Come on," I said. "Time to get out of here."

"I'm staying," he said. "I belong here."

I had no answer to that one. I turned away.

"You got to go now," Cono told me. "Leave me the gun to start the fire. I give you five minutes to get out."

**T**HE THING on the floor was mewing. Neither of us looked at it.

"One thing," Cono said. "I want you should know it so you'll maybe feel better. About that bartender. You didn't knock him off. You hit him with a bottle, but that didn't kill him. Varek killed him, later, when they dragged him in back to see how bad he was hurt. But he was going to pin the rap on you. I found out at the funeral home."

"Thanks," I said.

"Now go away," said Cono.

And I went. I walked through the rooms and didn't look back. I climbed the ladder back to the basement. When I reached the top I heard the muffled sound of a shot from below me, far away.

Long before the flames spread, I was out of the house and on my way to the Loop.

Next morning I read about the place burning to the ground, and that was the end.

But this is a story that never ends.

I keep thinking of those "dead storage" places in other cities. I keep wondering if Varek had turned every-

body off that night—or if others walked in other places. The way he and Cono and Vera had all told me. "If you only knew how many..."

That's what frightens me.

That's why, wherever I go now, I'm afraid of women wearing high collars and chokers. Men in turtle-neck sweaters or even a clergyman's collar. I think of the red scar under the scarf. And I wonder.

## TOO GOOD TO BE USED!

By Pearl Miller



THE LARGEST telescope in the world today is the famous \$600,000 telescope at Mt. Palomar, with the 200-inch Hale reflector. 800,000 times as powerful as the human eye, which at best can see only a few thousand of the billions of stars, this instrument is the means of viewing more than six thousand million stars. It enables man to see into space a distance of more than 1,200,000,000 times the distance that light, traveling at the rate of 186,000 miles per second, will travel in a year.

The casting of the glass for the giant mirror was one of the great scientific triumphs. It took eleven months of the highest skill and precision work of everybody concerned, to produce a perfect slab which would be free from any strains or imperfections. The polishers had perhaps the greatest responsibility of all—since the mirror was polished to an accuracy of one millionth of an inch of the specifications. One tiny slip, and the entire job would be ruined.

The brains and experience and ingenuity of some of the best engineers and astronomers were used in the mounting. Weighing a million pounds, the mounting is so large that it includes a complete astronomical laboratory in itself.

Most amazing of all is the fact that the telescope is the equivalent of an eight-story building and yet is so delicately balanced on its oil bearings that the touch of a finger will move it.

But strangely enough, this gigantic optical achievement will not be used for viewing the Moon or any of the relatively nearby planets. Since the Earth's atmosphere is also greatly magnified in the huge mirror, this would interfere greatly when studying nearby objects like the Moon which is only 239,000 miles away. In the words of one astronomer: "It would be like using the Queen Mary to ferry across the Hudson."

I wonder when someone or something will float through my window again. I wonder what walks abroad at night and waits to drag me down.

I wonder how I, or you, or anyone can tell, as we go about our daily rounds, which are the living and which are the dead. For all we know, they may be all around us. Because:

*The dead don't die!*

THE END

## THE MAGIC TRANSFORMATION

By E. Bruce Yaches



IN ADDITION to astronomy and astrophysics, there is another method of exploring the universe which is bound to have a profound influence upon our psychic knowledge. It conceives the universe to be a great reservoir of energies continuously sending strong, vibrant, life-giving impulses upon our earth. Rays of the subtlest material from outer space permeate all organic being. Cosmic energies induce all earthly biological processes. Light, heat, electromagnetic, and unknown cosmic rays become materialized and transformed upon the earth, where they show themselves as the fate of nations and cultures, as the biologic and psychic experiences of all creation.

This is really magic transformation—this physics of our universe which turns cosmic energies into life and death, into the evolution of a culture and the catastrophe of a nation. The creative group of energies dominates the steam of all the others which flow to the earth from the sun, moon, and the planets, and this is where the processes of life are originated.

By reason of this daily and hourly interchange of cosmic and earthly forces, the biological organism of animal life has become the finest and most complicated receiving set for delicate electromagnetic and radioactive waves. It adapts itself to the emanations of the earth itself, the high frequencies that come from air and water, to the rays of the sun and those from outer space. In soul, mind and body, it adapts itself to the earth, responding every year, day and hour to the curves of periodicity. These curves are important for all of life, but particularly for medicine, psychiatry, pedagogy, criminology, and general statistics. In the last analysis, the rutting season, the rates of birth and suicide, of criminal acts, of insanity, epidemics, artistic and scientific discoveries, may be considered as biologic adjustments between our tiny earth and the forces of the cosmos.

# HOW DEEP IS THE OCEAN...?

By  
Merritt Linn

A RECORD descent of 4,500 feet into the Pacific Ocean off Santa Cruz Island, California, was made about three years ago by a Boston explorer, Otis Barton.

The equipment in which Mr. Barton made his descent was a steel ball measuring 57½" in outside diameter. It accommodated two persons who climbed in through a 15" door sealed with a synthetic rubber gasket. The occupants were able to study deep ocean life through two windows of fused quartz, one pointed straight ahead, the other pointed down at an angle of 45 degrees. The surface boat, the *Velcor IV*, was in constant

contact with the divers by means of a two-way telephone.

At 4,500 feet below the surface, the air temperature in the "benthoscope" was near the freezing point; outside pressure was more than a ton to the square foot—a total pressure of about 75 tons battering on the 2-inch thick walls of the benthoscope.

The \$15,000 benthoscope was built to descend two miles, and would have gone further than the 4,500 feet if the lighting system had been in working order. The entire operation—from the time of leaving the surface boat to returning to it—took one hour and twenty minutes.

# THE CANCEROUS VIRUS!

By  
Carter T. Wainwright

SCIENTISTS have long suspected that there may be some relationship between the insidious virus and cancer. Recent experiments tend to confirm this hypothesis, though it is not yet a matter of certainty. In experimental animals, not in human beings, it has been possible to introduce certain forms of cancerous tissue by stimulating the flesh of the animals with injections of certain filterable viruses.

The filterable virus is something in which science has been extremely interested and about which scientists know very little. It appears to be sort of a link between inorganic crystalline forms and living bacteria. It is sort of a half-way station between dead and living matter, and medical men are hard put to classify it (the virus) as either organic or inorganic matter. One of the outstanding properties of the virus is its ability to pass through ceramic filters which ordinarily trap any sort of living matter, such as bacteria.

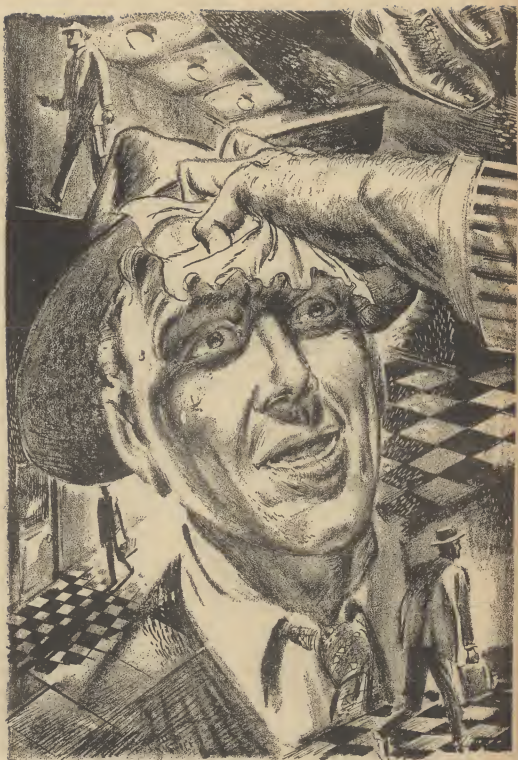
A study of Hodgkins' disease, an infection which causes the swelling and destruction of glandular tissue in the body, has disclosed that a virus is apparently responsible for it. Now, Hodgkins' disease is an invariably fatal form of cancer. Ground-up tissue from the cancer, made into an infusion and injected into chicken embryos, killed those embryos, a behavior entirely to be expected of a filterable virus, for the infusion was passed through

a ceramic filter before injection. Incidentally, the virus exhibited a characteristic common to most viruses. It prevented another virus, in this case influenza, from attacking the embryo it had already attacked itself.

Thus, it appears almost to be a certainty that this particular form of cancer called Hodgkins' disease is definitely due to some sort of a filterable virus. It would be an error to label immediately all forms of cancer as viruses. But the fact that one form can be detected with these properties is indeed a hopeful clue.

From the laboratories warring on cancer come frequent optimistic bits of information such as this, though no final all-out discoveries have been made. It is ironic, in a sense, that laboratories equipped with the finest sort of material aids, with every tool at their hand, and with almost unlimited funds, are not able to dent this mystery of cancer.

It also serves to show that equipment isn't everything, a thought which requires some amplification these days. Somehow or other, primarily because of the success of the huge atomic bomb project, people have gotten the idea that if you spend enough money, anything may be done. True, it may, but only with one provision—that you have the right brains on the job and they have the good fortune that must dog every researchers' footsteps. Without this blend of brains and luck, even fifty-million dollar cyclotrons don't help.

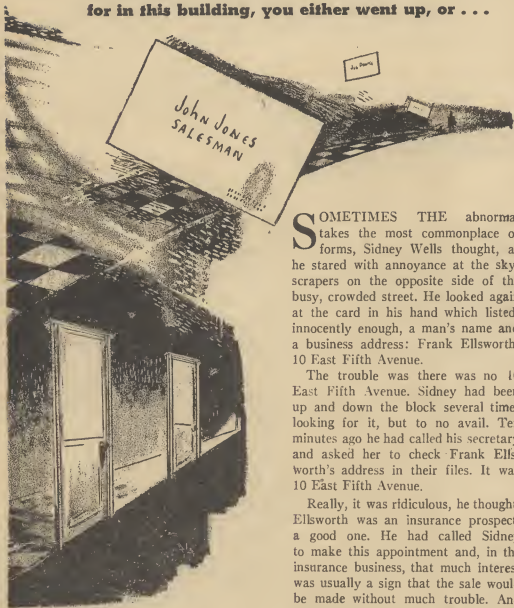


Suddenly, the building had become a labyrinth of corridors, with no beginning and no end

# THERE'S NO WAY OUT!

*By William P. McGivern*

**"Going up?" said the elevator operator. This question was to haunt Leland Gray for eternity, for in this building, you either went up, or . . .**



SOMETIMES THE abnormal takes the most commonplace of forms, Sidney Wells thought, as he stared with annoyance at the skyscrapers on the opposite side of the busy, crowded street. He looked again at the card in his hand which listed, innocently enough, a man's name and a business address: Frank Ellsworth, 10 East Fifth Avenue.

The trouble was there was no 10 East Fifth Avenue. Sidney had been up and down the block several times looking for it, but to no avail. Ten minutes ago he had called his secretary and asked her to check Frank Ellsworth's address in their files. It was 10 East Fifth Avenue.

Really, it was ridiculous, he thought. Ellsworth was an insurance prospect, a good one. He had called Sidney to make this appointment and, in the insurance business, that much interest was usually a sign that the sale would be made without much trouble. And now, because of this irritating confusion about the address, he was al-



ready late for the appointment. Maybe the delay would give Ellsworth time to change his mind. Or he might go out to lunch or a meeting and then, as those things happened, not be available again for weeks.

Sidney turned and, with an air of determination, walked back to the nearest intersection where a policeman was directing traffic. On the way, he planned how he could explain his tardiness to Ellsworth. Make a joke of it, perhaps. Or tell the plain silly truth. That might be better. But who would buy insurance from a man who couldn't find an address? Then he took comfort from the thought that it was Ellsworth's own card which had given him all the trouble. There was the angle. No criticism of Ellsworth, of course, but pointing out that you couldn't be sure of anything in this world. Except death and taxes, of course. That's why an adequate insurance program was essential to every forward-looking, progressive executive. Then...

**H**E WAS beside the policeman. "Pardon me, Officer, but I'm looking for 10 East Fifth Avenue." He smiled, good-humoredly, and with just enough self-deprecation to make the patrolman feel expansive. "Without much luck, I might admit."

Sidney had been a salesman for so long that unconsciously, as he breathed and slept and tied his shoes, he made friends of people. Not friends really, in the sense that they liked him or would do anything for him, but at least he got a pleasant reaction from people most of the time.

"Well, no wonder," the patrolman said. "Somebody gave you a bum steer. There's no 10 East Fifth Avenue. Who're you looking for?"

"A man named Ellsworth."

"Afraid I don't know him. I know

lots of businessmen in this block. Been on this beat for sixteen years."

Sidney went away feeling more and more nettled. This was the sort of thing that just didn't happen to him. His motto was, "Take care of the little problems, and you won't have any big ones." His filing system, and check-up system, were models of order and efficiency. On top of that, Sidney cross-indexed all his clients and prospects by occupation, religion, hobbies, clubs, and so forth. Then when he met a checker-playing enthusiast, he could go back to his files, find other checker-players there, and toss their names into his next interview with the new prospect. He never missed appointments, or forgot first names, or left his rate book at home. Even if he was going to a movie he took the rate book along, because you never could tell, you might get talking to the person sitting next to you, or to someone in the lobby, or even the ticket taker. They were all prospects. That was why this present impasse was so frustrating. If he were a careless person, it might be expected, or at least tolerated.

He walked back down the block, frowning at the numbers, and then, abruptly, there it was: Number 10 East Fifth Avenue.

**I**T WAS a tall white building, with revolving doors, conventional in all respects. Sidney's relief was tempered by a sense of confusion. Surely he must have passed this entrance ten times looking for it.

And how about the cop? No such number, he'd said. Sidney made a mental note to drop a line to the commissioner about that. With a last glance at his watch, he hurried through the revolving doors.

The directory surprised him, and added to his confusion. There were names on it, plenty of them, but not

Ellsworth's; and there were no floor numbers opposite the names. Also, the names weren't in alphabetical order. Sidney walked through the expensive looking lobby to the bank of elevators. There he talked with the starter, a dumpy balding man in a blue uniform.

"I'm looking for a man named Ellsworth," he said. "He's in the trucking business. Could you tell me his floor and office number, please?"

"You'll have to check the directory," the starter said, pleasantly enough. "I can't remember all our tenant's names and offices. It's just back there near the revolving doors."

"But it's no help," Sidney said.

"No help? What do you mean?"

"Well, there aren't any floor numbers or office numbers on it. Also, Ellsworth's name isn't there. It's the damndest directory I've ever seen."

"Hmnn, that's odd. Of course, things change around here pretty fast. Maybe the building manager had the directory changed. He's like that. But I haven't had any other complaints. Tell you what: Take any car and go up to the tenth floor. There's an information booth there, and they can probably straighten you out."

"Thanks very much," Sidney said in a relieved voice, and hurried into the nearest elevator. Now he was on the right track at last. Sidney had a positive affection for information counters. Occasionally, as he walked through a department store or railroad station, he would stop at the information counter and ask a few questions for the fun of it. He appreciated the quick alert answers, and the feeling that here was Knowledge, confined and indexed, waiting to serve him.

**H**E TOLD the elevator operator he wanted to get off at the tenth floor, and the man said, "Yes,

sir!" and closed the doors with a sharp click. They shot up silently, swiftly, and then the doors slid open.

"Thank you very much," Sidney said. He stepped out into a corridor that was empty except for a worried looking little man who was standing by a hand truck.

"Pardon me," Sidney said. "Could you tell me where the information booth is?"

"Information booth?" The little man shook his head with a thoughtful frown. "I never heard of one on this floor."

Sidney felt his blood pressure rising. "Now see here, this is ridiculous. The starter told me there was an information counter up here."

"Well, you can't pay too much attention to what he says," the little man said. "At least I don't." He laughed and rubbed his head with a gesture of humorous resignation. "An information counter is what I need, to tell the truth. Look here now." Nodding at the hand truck which was loaded with eight cardboard boxes, he said, "I'm supposed to deliver these to a man named Smith. Now, you tell me how I'm going to do it."

Sidney had the sort of mind that was sympathetic to any sort of trouble—particularly if it were someone else's. "Well, what's so difficult about that?" he asked. "What's Smith's office number?"

"That's just it," the little man said triumphantly. "I don't have his number. And neither does my boss. He just sent me out to find Smith."

"Perhaps the nature of the merchandise will be a clue," Sidney said, in the jocular tone he used with menials. He opened one of the boxes and blinked when he found it empty. "There's nothing in these boxes," he said, shaking his head.

"Sure, I know that," the little man said. "Makes it tough, doesn't it?"

"I suppose so," Sidney agreed. He was suddenly shaken with a sense of confusion. "How long have you been looking for Smith? Why don't you go back to your office and get the right address?"

"Hmmpfh. They won't know anything there. I been after Smith for six months now, and the way it looks, I'll be after him six years before I find him. But I can't stand here all day and waste my time. Got to be getting on. Goodbye."

Sidney watched in puzzled silence as the man moved off at a shuffling gate, pushing the truck ahead of him, and glancing at the numbers on the doors he passed.

**S**UDDENLY, SIDNEY was angry. This nonsense was ceasing to be funny. He'd go back to that stupid starter and get this matter straightened out once and for all. Time was money, and he was wasting it like a spendthrift. Or, rather, this silly building was wasting it for him. In a mood of cold determination, Sidney punched the bell for the elevator. The doors slid open almost instantly.

"Going up?"

"No, I'm going down!" Sidney said.

The elevator operator, a young man with black hair and large eyes, looked at him curiously. "Down, sir?"

"Yes, that's what I said."

"But our elevators don't run *down*, sir," the young man said, as if stating a simple, well-known fact. "We only go *up*."

"Now see here, young man, this impudence is going to get you in serious trouble," Sidney cried, thoroughly enraged. "How do people get out of this blasted building if the elevators don't run *down*."

The young man looked honestly puzzled. "When people leave, they go *up* to the lobby and out into the street."

"They go *up* to the lobby and out into the street, eh?" Sidney said in a controlled but trembling voice. "Take me to the manager of this building then, please. I've got a lot to talk to that person about." He stepped into the elevator, his arms crossed at a determined angle.

"Why, of course, sir!"

They went swiftly upward for a half dozen floors, and then the elevator came to a smooth stop. "Here you are, sir," the young man said, as the doors opened. "It's just to the right."

"Thank you!" Sidney's voice was cold with sarcasm.

He strode to the right down a well-lighted, wide corridor. There were doors on either side, with numbers and firm names on them. But after walking to the end of the corridor, Sidney couldn't find the Building Manager's office. He retraced his steps slowly, frowning and angry. Another stupid error! Couldn't these people get one thing straight! You asked for one thing, they told you another. They sent you off on wild-goose chases, wasted your time scandalously, and talked gibberish about elevators that only ran up. It was a crying shame that such a place should be so horribly mismanaged. Emboldened by his sense of outrage, he opened the next door on his right, on which was printed the sign: "Courtley Bros. Attorneys."

**T**HREE SOLEMN-FACED men sitting at a round table glanced up at him with polite interest.

"Please forgive me for barging in this way," Sidney said, "but I'm looking for the manager of the building. The elevator man said it was on this floor, but obviously—"

"Sit down, please," one of the men said in a grave voice. He was middle-aged, and dressed somberly in gray. His skull was pink and bald with a

corona of white hair about the edge. "We were discussing some matters pertaining to a rather large estate."

Unwillingly, Sidney took the fourth chair at the round, polished table. "I hate to intrude, but I've been having a time of it getting around in this building."

The men regarded him politely, but with no show of understanding.

"I mean, things seem frightfully confused here," Sidney said.

"I hadn't noticed it," one of the men said. "But let's get back to business. You feel, then, we should sell all of the common stock?"

The question was evidently addressed to Sidney. They all waited for his answer.

"Now, see here—" Sidney began.

But got no further. "Well, we'll consider it settled then," the bald-headed man said, giving him a warm smile.

"But this is a mistake," Sidney said. "You're confusing me with someone else. I've never seen any of you before in my life. I'm an insurance man. I don't know anything about this estate you're talking about." His voice was high with desperation, and there was sweat on his brow.

"Well, that's as it should be," one of the men observed, and his companions nodded in agreement.

Sidney felt he was among mad men. "Please, can you tell me how to get to the Building Manager's office. That's the only reason I stopped in here. You see—"

"Why, of course," one of the men interrupted. It's down two flights, but you'll have to walk, I'm afraid. You see, the elevators don't run down."

Sidney jumped to his feet and bolted through the door. Outside, he mopped his perspiring forehead, while panic and reason fought for control of his senses. Reason, after a long

battle, won out. His pulses subsided, and he drew a deep breath. Two floors down, they'd said. Well, he'd give it a try. And if he ran into any more monkeyshines, he'd just clear out. He recalled the date, June 11th. Nothing wrong with that. If it had been April Fool's day, he'd have had his answer to this nonsense. But on a normal day in June, it was totally inexplicable.

**SIDNEY** PROWLED along the corridor until he found a door with the words 'STAIRWAY' painted on it. He pushed it open and trotted briskly down two flights of cement stairs. There, he tried a steel door with glazed glass windows set in the upper half. It was locked.

Sidney's patience and nerve broke. He swore wildly and hammered on the door. What was wrong? Had everyone suddenly gone mad? Was there no sense or order left in the world? As these questions wheeled wildly in his mind, he continued his blows on the door.

But there was no answer. Then suddenly, after an interval of fruitless hammering on the door, Sidney's brain began to function intelligently again. He stopped pounding the door and collected himself into a reasoning unit once more. Very well, he thought, I'll clear out of this madhouse. I've tried my best to get some sensible cooperation, but to no avail. I'll walk down these steps to the lobby, if it takes me two hours. And then I'll step out of this building and call it good riddance. Fortified by this plan of action, Sidney started briskly down the stairs. One flight, two flights, three, he took the steps two at a time, feeling that every minute was bringing him closer to sanity and escape.

Then the stairs ended against a blank wall.

Sidney was too stunned for an instant to do anything but stare in pop-eyed incredulity at this barrier.

"It's—it's ridiculous," he whispered. "It—it doesn't make sense."

He felt the rough cement wall with the tip of his fingers, pushed against it with his shoulder, and studied it from floor to ceiling for some crack or aperture that would indicate the presence of an opening or a door. But there was none. He could go no further. He was trapped. Vainly, he attempted to guess what floor he was on. He had gone originally to the tenth. Then up an undetermined number of floors, and down two. Then down three more. Up ten, up X. and down five. Where did that leave him? There was no way of telling. And even if he knew, what good would that do?

Sidney toiled upward to the next floor and tried the door. It swung inward and he stepped into a wide, well-lighted corridor that was precisely like the others he had seen in the building.

**A** MAN IN a gray, double-breasted suit was walking toward him, whistling aimlessly. He was a slender man, about fifty, with rosy cheeks, and a thin inquiring face. He wore a flower in his buttonhole, and exuded an air of jaunty well-being.

"Pardon me, sir," Sidney said. "Could you direct me to the manager of this building?"

"Why certainly! I'm the manager of the building. What did you wish to see me about?"

Sidney almost fainted with relief. He smiled and patted his damp brow with his handkerchief. "I've had quite a time finding you," he said.

"Well, that's too bad." The manager had a sympathetic voice. "You should have inquired of someone. Practically anyone in the building

could have told you where I could be reached. But come along. We'll step into my office."

"Fine," Sidney said.

They walked the length of the corridor and turned right. There, twenty feet from the intersection, were two camp chairs. The manager sat down in one and waved Sidney to the other. Sidney looked up and down the corridor, and again the overwhelming sense of confusion swept over him. "This is your office?"

"Why, yes. I move about frequently, so this arrangement suits me perfectly. Now, what is it you wish to talk about?"

Sidney sat down and crossed his legs. His manner was determined and righteous. "I have a rather serious complaint to bring to your attention. First, your directory is totally valueless. Secondly, the elevator starter in the lobby is either a liar or a moron. Thirdly, your elevator operators are impudent and—"

"I'm afraid I can't remember all of that at one time," the manager said. "Let's start again. What was that about the directory?"

"It makes no sense. The names aren't in alphabetical order. And there are no office numbers listed."

The manager frowned slightly. "Well, I see nothing unusual in that. But go on."

**SIDNEY POUNDED** a knee with his fist. "Nothing unusual, eh? Well, how do people find their way around, tell me that?"

"Have you met any other people who seemed lost?" the manager inquired in a soft voice.

"Well...no," Sidney admitted slowly. "But take that starter. He told me there was an information booth on the tenth floor. You know very well there isn't."

"No? Well, there might have been,

you know."

"There might have been! Is that the way you run this building?"

"But why not? Frankly, I don't see where you have any legitimate complaints, sir. All of these things you've mentioned are quite usual and customary here. But what was that about the elevator operator?"

"He wouldn't take me down! He said your elevators don't run down." Sidney's voice had taken on a high and trembling note.

"He was quite right."

"Well, how do I get out?"

"You go up, of course, and walk out the lobby, the same way you came in."

"I didn't come in the top of your blasted building!" Sidney screamed. "I'm no bird. I came in at the bottom."

"Oh, dear me." The manager regarded Sidney with an odd expression of curiosity and pity. "You came in from the bottom, eh?"

"Yes, I came in at the bottom." Sidney's voice had lost its pitch and volume. He repeated the manager's question in a dull hopeless voice.

"Well, that's interesting," the manager said. "Somebody should have fixed that doorway, I suppose. It's caused trouble before. Tell you what: You wait here and I'll go off and see what I can do for you. Won't be a minute."

He smiled and walked briskly away. Sidney smoked a cigarette and waited. Time passed slowly. Twenty minutes, thirty minutes, an hour. There were eight cigarette stubs on the floor at Sidney's feet.

He jumped to his feet, cursing under his breath, and strode off in the direction the manager had taken. Turning a corner, he bumped into a man who carried a blanket over his arm.

"Do you know where I might find

the building manager?" Sidney said.

"At his home, I suppose," the man answered. "He left here about an hour ago."

"When will he be back?"

"That's an odd question," the man said, grinning. "He won't be back at all, of course."

"Won't be back at all?"

"Of course not. His job ended today."

"He's retired?"

"I suppose you could say that. He's had the blooming job all day. That's enough for a man, I say."

"You mean he's only the manager for one day?"

"That's the rule, as you should know. Goodbye."

SIDNEY WAS left alone in the clean empty corridor. His mind was spinning slowly and effortlessly. He knew he should be angry—but at what? Vaguely, he realized that there were things he should be doing, action to be taken, to get out of this monstrous area of insanity. But everything was vague. That was the trouble. It was also the blessing. Not knowing sharply and precisely what to do, he could do nothing.

From somewhere came an earlier thought of his: *Sometimes the abnormal takes the most commonplace of forms.* What did that mean? Also, skirting his consciousness, was the manager's bland comment: *Somebody should have fixed that doorway...*

Through his comfortably vague thoughts came a vision as sharp as a needlepoint. A vision of doorways, strange but familiar, innocent but dangerous, into which people with address cards in their hands walked confidently and blindly. In every city, in every country, there might be such doorways—doorways that hadn't been fixed!

Sidney turned and with slow faltering steps walked back along the corridor. From a side door, the one he had used himself, came a man with a flushed angry face and bewildered eyes. The man carried a brief case under one arm, and held a card in his hand. He was a fat man, with a heavy jaw and thinning black hair.

"Hey, you," he said to Sidney. "I've been getting the run around in this damn building for the past half hour. It's 10 East Fifth Avenue, isn't it?"

"Well, it might be," Sidney answered.

"You mean, you don't know?"

"Well, not exactly."

The man swore. "Are you all nuts in here? Starters, elevator men, clean-

ing women, are you all nuts? Will you tell me where the hell I can get a straight answer, please?"

"You'll have to see the building manager."

The man looked relieved. "Well, where is he?"

"His office is just around the corner," Sidney said.

"Well, thanks. Thanks a lot. I'll burn his ears, let me tell you."

With that the man clutched the brief case under his arm and walked down the corridor with angry, determined strides.

Sidney sighed. And then, with only the faintest curiosity stirring in his soul, he went slowly toward the elevators that only and forever travelled upward.

THE END

## JUST BLEED OLD MOTHER EARTH

By

Salem Lane

THERE ARE many volcanic regions on Earth whose underground layers are seething infernos of heat and steam activity. Almost invariably these repositories of energy go to waste or burst into spectacular and useless pyrotechnics. But there is one spot where this energy has been harnessed. In Italy, just south of the city of Florence, for many decades steam has been bled from the Earth's interior and used to operate electric generating plants. Recently, with aid from the ECA, about three quarters of a billion kilowatt hours generating plant has been set up.

Previously, natural cracks in the Earth permitted steam to escape. These cracks were capped and the steam used in turbines. Today the engineers go down into the Earth for their steam. Using conventional oil well drilling equipment, they bore from one thousand to two thousand feet down and tap into vast steam reservoirs which are inexhaustible since natural volcanic action is creating the steam. This steam is led through pipes into regular turbine electric generating equipment and your electric energy is guaranteed indefinitely. There is no costly outlay for dams, fuels, storage, etc. Just bleed the steam from

old Mother Earth. She takes care of everything!

The success of this work has impressed many engineers and already extensive surveys are being made all over the world for the same sort of thing. Alaska is rich in volcanic ground, Japan, portions of Africa. Most of these places desperately need power. Getting it from the ground is the answer. A nice by-product of this Earth-tapping is a chemical product. Boric acid and other mineral substances quite useful are a part of the reward of the Earth borings.

It is suggested by imaginative engineers that the heat energy of the Earth could be tapped not only in volcanic regions, but practically anywhere if only the shafts could be sunk deep enough! It is known that the temperature increases as you go deeper into the ground. There is no reason to suppose this is a limiting process. In fact, the contrary seems to be true. Therefore, if you could sink a shaft deeply enough anywhere you could either tap off steam directly or feed water into the drilling and produce your own steam. These potentialities will be thoroughly investigated by a future world hungry for energy and power—of the electrical, not political variety!



## THE ZEROth LAW!

By Jon Barry

FROM THE standpoint of abstractness, thermodynamics is one of the most elusive branches of science. Studied theoretically, it is actually hard to get a grasp on this subject even though the facts of it are common every-day experience. In some respects, thermodynamics seems like a beautiful but sterile mathematical exercise. Naturally this isn't really true, for the subject has given us too many practical things.

For example, the very definition of *temperature* is a thorough one. A scientist takes a roundabout way to describe temperature. He starts first with the famous "zeroth" law of thermodynamics". It's called the zeroth law because it was thought of after the first and second laws; to be consistent they slapped the term "zeroth" on it. It says: two systems (systems are isolated solids or gases or liquids in insulated containers) are in thermal equilibrium with each other if they are in thermal equilibrium with a third system! That doesn't sound like much, eh? Now, what is thermal equilibrium? The scientists answer that with the statement that two systems are in thermal equilibrium if their thermodynamic coordinates are the same—i.e. pressure, volume, etc. After all of this yakking, they define temperature "as that quality of a system which determines whether or not it is in thermal equilibrium with another!" What a circular way!

To most of us, however, temperature is more concretely described as a number proportional to the kinetic energy of the molecules constituting the substance—that we can understand. But that isn't the only complication. Thermodynamics goes so far as to describe heat as a way of changing the internal energy of the system!

Of what value are these highly theoretical, hypothetical ivory tower definitions? It's easy to laugh at them, but they do have a value. They abstract from experience the vital facts on which theory is constructed and just like Einsteinian Relativity which sounds like nonsense the first time it's studied, these abstruse theorizations have actually great utilitarian value when they're applied.

You can cook a hot dog or warm a house without knowing theoretical thermodynamics, but you can't design a jet engine or a rocket motor! That's the best excuse that can be found for the existence of a subject so fond of knocking pre-conceived intuitional ideas into a cocked hat! We may hate "thermo" but it's here to stay—and make our lives more pleasant!

## "YOU'RE CRAZY, DOC!"

By Sandy Miller

IF YOU were sitting in a classroom and the Professor suddenly said to the class, "I'm going to give you a problem—solve it," you wouldn't be particularly surprised. You'd just sit back and wait for him to talk, holding your pencil and paper in readiness. But what would you think if the problem went like this: "One day it started to snow at a steady, heavy rate of fall. A snow-plow went into operation at noon, plowing two miles the first hour and one mile the second hour. When did it start to snow? The instinctive reaction to such a proposed problem would be, "Doc, you're nuttier than a fruit-cake! C'mon, let's have some more details." But you'd be wrong, for the problem is perfectly solvable, it contains all the necessary information, and bears no relation to the old one about "how old is the captain?"

This problem quoted above will be found invariably in any course which is called "differential equations", a high-sounding name for a subject which is of the utmost practical value in science, engineering and mathematics. Differential equations are an outgrowth of calculus, and Sir Isaac Newton proposed and solved many problems in differential equations in connection with his theoretical astronomical work. In fact, in almost any mechanical or electrical problem differential equations arise. They are simply mathematical statements involving rates or speeds (which are called, technically, "derivatives"). A knowledge of differential equations is part of the training of any engineer and they lie at the foundation of physics.

The problem which sounded so ludicrous above is very easily soluble when you know the tricks—like all mathematics—and there is nothing flighty or abstruse about it. It turns out that the snow started to fall at twenty-three minutes after eleven in the morning approximately! If you doubt, ask an engineering friend to solve it. He'll verify it in a hurry.

The next time somebody confronts you with a problem that sounds like it came from an idiot, check up first—he might have grabbed it from a mathematical text-book. If you actually do investigate differential equations, you will note that the very minimum of fact and data are necessary to come up with some elaborate and surprising answers. Rocket engineers love differential equations and the whole operation of a rocket can be summarized in a tiny squib of an equation. We're building our future on differential equations—and it looks mighty rosy!

# THE PRESIDENT WILL SEE YOU ...

*By Rog Phillips*

The Quantorian leaned out of the tank.  
"Now, see here, Officer..." he began



**If from out of unknown space comes a  
formidable enemy, how can Earth save itself?  
See Ordinance No. 79, Section A, Vehicle Code**

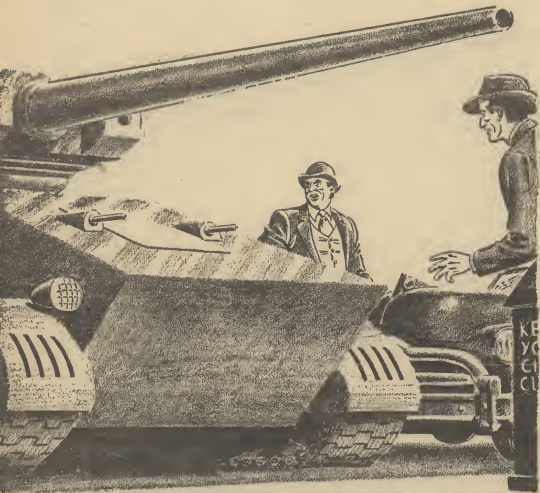
**"I**T WOULD BE useless to resist." The President had said that over the radio. The astronomers had said it to the President after observing the space armada encircling the Earth.

They had counted the ships of the alien fleet in the same way a laboratory technician counts red blood corpuscles in a person's blood stream, by counting them in a small

measured space and multiplying the figure by the total volume occupied. Two hundred million ships.

They had studied the ships with the techniques that had been used to measure the stars and planets. Each ship was approximately a hundred times bigger than our biggest battleships.

One of those giant spaceships with a hundred Hydrogen bombs in its



holds could have ruled the world. And they had Hydrogen bombs. They had exploded three of them just outside the atmosphere to attract attention, half hour intervals between each exploding. The astronomers had taken movies and spectro pictures of the third one. From these they had stated flatly that they were Hydrogen bombs.

For seven days after the bomb explosions, the ships had arrived and taken up orbits around the Earth from a thousand to fifteen hundred miles out.

Then the newspapers had brought out extras carrying the news that one of the aliens had been uncovered in a small town in Indiana. Their next editions had announced the story was a hoax, but no one believed that.

Another week had passed. Then came the announcement direct from the President of the world, that one of the spaceships had landed near Fort Knox and unloaded twenty billion dollars in gold. For which it had received twenty billion dollars in ones, fives, tens and twenties, to be used by the army of occupation "so that they would not disrupt the economic structure of the nation."

Experts in authoritative newspaper articles pointed out that this move made it possible for the invaders to land and overrun the country without causing thousands of small businesses to go broke; that in this way the aliens could seize the nation as a going concern and enslave it. Business men immediately hired every available man and woman to prepare for the twenty billion dollar increase in business.

Another two weeks passed during which the aliens out in space were undoubtedly distributing the twenty billions among their army of occupation. And perhaps learning to speak English, since that first alien had

spent his week learning it, and had gone back out with the ship that brought the gold and took away the newly printed greenbacks.

During that two weeks, there was little else in the paper other than articles by experts on the expected landing in force. It was pointed out that once the invaders had taken over the country, they could not only take back their own gold, but all the rest of the gold at Fort Knox, so their move to "preserve the economy" would cost them nothing, actually.

**SPECULATION** WAS thrown into the inner pages with the landing at the Chicago airport of a small rocket job. Three men came out of it. Pictures of them were on the front pages. They requested audience with the mayor. They stayed two days, then went back up. The authoritative speculators went rampant again.

Then the mayor issued a statement: "Chicago is to be the first point of invasion," he told the world. "The invaders have leased the airport for the two weeks from July 7th through the 21st. One of their giant ships will land there, filling the entire field. From it will disembark a hundred thousand mechanized troops who will distribute themselves throughout the city. No other part of the Earth will be invaded until this bridgehead has been stabilized."

The president of the First National Bank of Chicago admitted to reporters that the invaders had two hundred million dollars on deposit in a checking account there, and had drawn on that fund to lease the airport from the city.

The city tax department let it leak that three million dollars had been given to them in exchange for title to vacant lots distributed over the city that the invaders would use for their troops.

Hotels let it be known that five hundred rooms had been reserved and paid for in advance on a permanent resident basis by the invaders.

From the experience gained by being host to hundreds of national conventions, Chicago prepared for the invasion. Extra police were hired. Not only in anticipation of the traffic tangles, but to handle the already existing traffic tangles as throngs congregated to see the vacant lots *owned by the invaders*.

And no one was thinking of it in terms of a shooting war any more. Even the national guard was making its plans only in terms of assisting the police to maintain order.

"WHAT DO you think of it, Harry?" the mayor of Chicago asked, his eyes on the television screen bringing a long distance shot of the giant spaceship settling onto the airport and covering it like a nest.

"The same thing I've felt all along," the President said. "So big that even the most grandiose schemes of man seem small time beside the least of their accomplishments. I had to come here to Chicago to watch it."

The view on the screen switched to a vantage point at the edge of the airport field. The ship had already settled down. Giant ports were swinging open downward to form ramps, and as soon as they contacted the ground, streamlined tanks poured down them four abreast.

"The police have streets blocked off so that there won't be any traffic troubles," the mayor said quietly.

The television scene shifted to one of the exits from the airport to the street. A tall policeman motioned for the lead tanks to turn north. The others followed, keeping in orderly ranks as they picked up speed.

"How many are there, I wonder,"

the President said.

"I can tell you that, Harry," the mayor said with a dry smile. "They're so determined not to disrupt our economy that they bought driver's licenses for each of the tank drivers. Thirty thousand, to be exact."

"Thirty thousand tanks!" the President said.

The television scene shifted back to an aerial view directly over the airport. It showed the streams of tanks looking for all the world like marching ribbons of ants as they poured from the ship into the street.

"TV channel six has been vacated for them too," the mayor said quietly. "Their communications use that one. Let's see what we can pick up."

He went to the set and twisted the knob to channel six. A face flashed onto the screen. A handsome, intelligent face. It might have been that of an ordinary American except for small details. It was more Caucasian than Asiatic, a smooth blend of both.

From the speaker came fluid sounds in a strange tongue, orders being issued to the tank borne troops.

"We don't get much from that, Martin," the President said.

THE MAYOR switched back. Something had evidently happened. The commentator's voice was excited. The scene was a street corner. The tanks were stalled. Under one of them was what appeared to be the remains of a bicycle.

There were two policemen and a very scared little boy. Heads were sticking out of tanks. A man was climbing out of the one under which the crushed bike lay.

The mayor and the President began to grin as the tank driver showed his driver's license and the policeman started writing on a ticket pad.

"It's almost ludicrous," the President said.

"Look at the policeman, Harry," the mayor said. "He's pale as a ghost. He's writing a ticket because he doesn't know what else to do."

The television scene switched to one of the vacant lots where half a dozen of the tanks had dropped out of the stream and entered. Fifty police were holding back the crowd of curious.

It switched back to the airport where a stream of tanks was still emerging from the giant spaceship.

"Thirty thousand of them—for Chicago alone!" the President murmured. "And we have less than that number in our whole armed forces, and all of them more unwieldy and vulnerable to direct assault." He stared at the screen silently for several minutes, then: "I wonder what they plan for us after the occupation is completed.... Industrial slavery? Depopulation, taking large chunks of the population to another planet? I've been afraid to answer those questions. We're so helpless that all we can do is give in and hope for the best."

The mayor didn't answer. He was watching the television screen, a thoughtful expression on his face. The last of the tanks emerged from the ship. As they left the field, the TV view switched back to above the city, showing the long ribbons of tank columns stretching through the city like veins on a leaf.

Suddenly, the mayor turned to the President. "With your permission, Harry," he said gravely, "I'm going to try something. It's completely far-fetched, but it's our only hope to defeat these hordes from space."

"It doesn't involve shooting, does it, Martin?" the President asked.

"No, no shooting," the mayor said.

"Very well," the President agreed.

**T**HE QUANTORIAN entered the President's office, a worried frown creasing his high forehead.

"Sit down," the President said. "We

can talk better relaxed."

"I'm instructed to find out what can be done about the high handed methods of the mayor of Chicago," the Quantorian said stiffly. "We demand our tanks be returned to us."

"There's nothing I can do," the President said sympathetically. "The National Government has only limited power over the cities and states. Even I must obey their laws when in their jurisdiction." A smile struggled at the corners of his mouth. "I'm afraid you're going to have to admit defeat and take your ships to some other planet or star."

"We admit that," the Quantorian said, "but we want our tanks back. And our gold."

"Sorry," the President said. "Chicago has impounded your tanks for not having vehicle licenses, and since their ownership is not registered, you have no legal way of proving ownership. Chicago owns them. We're negotiating to buy them for our own army."

"Our gold then," the Quantorian said. "Your paper money will be worthless to us anywhere else."

"We could release up to perhaps a ton to you for dental purposes," the President said.

"We could ignore your laws," the Quantorian said, darkly.

"Yes," the President said, standing up in a gesture of dismissal, "you could. But you're just an expeditionary force under orders—and those orders include respecting the laws of governments of any peoples you encounter. I'll be glad to re-open discussion of the matter when you get orders from your government that change things."

"But it would take a thousand years to go home and get other instructions!" the Quantorian said.

"The President will see you then," the President said.

THE END

# OLDER EVEN THAN METHUSELAN

By

U. Arteaux

**T**HE TAMBOURINE Mountains in Queensland, Australia, are the home of the Macrozamia trees, said to be the oldest living thing on the face of the earth. Estimated to be between 12,000 and 15,000 years old, this tree looks somewhat like a palm. Each year a new ring of scales appears on the outside of the trunk. As the tree grows, these scales are pushed down toward the bottom of the trunk. As they move down, they become smaller and smaller until they are mere scratches that finally fade out entirely into the massive woody pulp of the trunk.

Referring to a particular Macrozamia tree in Queensland, Dr. William Malisoff of the University of Queensland says in his book *THE SPAN OF LIFE*, "...The Great Grandfather Peter at an age

of approximately 15,000 years was cut down by vandals in 1937 and, after three months, started to grow again upon replanting. It is now in three sections assembled in place by some 200 workers. So slow-living is this giant that ten or twelve years must elapse after being cut down before its complete death."

There is some difference of opinion with regard to the actual age of the Macrozamia trees, but it is safe to say that they are the oldest living things on earth. The giant bald cypress of Mexico that measures 185 feet around the trunk and is definitely known to be more than 4,000 years old, is younger than many of the Macrozamia in the Australian mountains. These trees were old when Moses was a boy, and they will still be living when we have commuter planes to Mars.

# LAW OF THE UNIVERSE

By

Peter Dakin

**I**F MANKIND could be surveyed objectively as a complete and single unit, rather than in all the manifest diversities of its parts, the destiny of man would emerge, in his own eyes, far beyond the limits of earthly history, to something of a cosmic significance.

Only if we see the fate of nations and cultures not as personal, subjective, human events, but as objective, superpersonal, organic occurrences produced from the totality of life, can we interpret history from any but a material viewpoint. To do so is to make them subject to the conditions and forces that induce and mold the existence of the mineral, floral, faunal, and astro-physical kingdoms. To see all history as a biological organism, with the destinies of nations, races, and cultures conceived as mass-individuals or superbeings with a life history like that of a single man. To interpret the whole theme not only on an anthropocentric but a cosmocentric scale. It means pushing our earthbound biological concepts into the life history of the universe itself.

It means transforming a material history into a non-material, superhistorical image, with things no longer of the human species, but of the universal species. The ever-present question: the cause and meaning of man on earth, would be no longer lost in a cloud of mysticism, but would identify itself with

the fundamental laws of the world.

Laws of a higher kind seem indicated. For above man, the nation, the stars, the entire planetary system, stand such super-individuals as human cultures, art forms, and the racial destiny of man which, in the eye of universal nature at least, are organisms subject to the common biologic law of birth, growth and death.

Mysterious energies "determine the tempo and rhythm of development, existence, and decay in all living substances. But those energies do not flow uninterruptedly—they leap in pulses, rhythms, curves—with peaks and valleys of waves, with periodic pauses and crises of weakness. These cycles govern the inorganic and biologic world alike, the world of human consciousness as well as that of civilization and history.

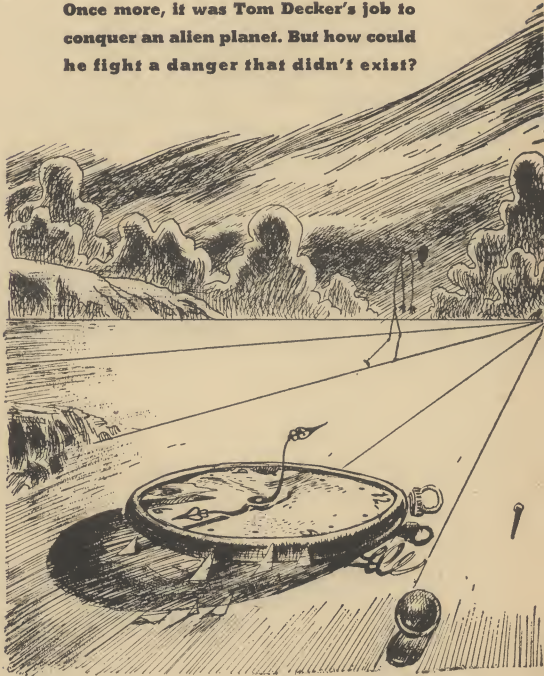
"Dead" matter is quickened and bound again by mysterious emanations of this original energy. Chemical and nonmaterial substances obey the principle of periodicity—electro-magnetic fields vibrate in periodic rhythms, and the chemical elements from hydrogen to uranium repeat their characteristics in fixed order. Man and beast have both physical and psychic periods.

Periodicity has come to assume the importance of a higher destiny-shaping principle. Periodicity is cosmic—the law of the universe!

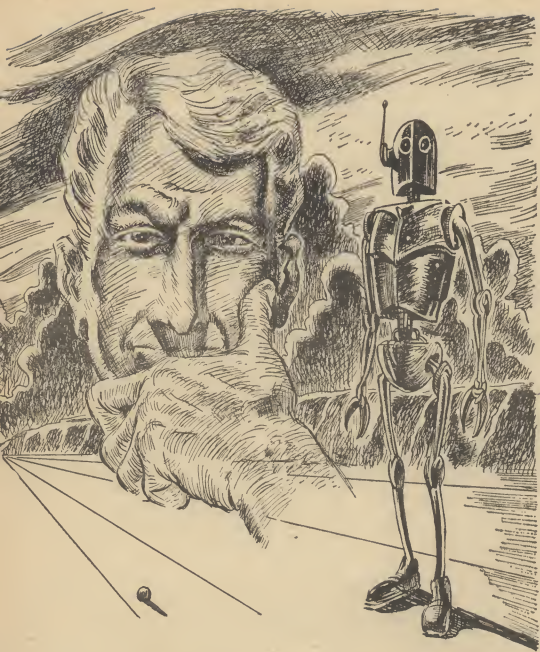


# **“YOU’LL NEVER GO HOME AGAIN!”**

**Once more, it was Tom Decker’s job to  
conquer an alien planet. But how could  
he fight a danger that didn’t exist?**



It was a world out of a nightmare—a world where the unfamiliar was far too familiar



## *By Clifford Simak*

**T**HERE WAS NOTHING, absolutely nothing, that could stop a human planetary survey party. It was a specialized unit created for and charged with one purpose only—to establish a bridgehead

on an alien planet, to blast out the perimeters of that bridgehead and establish a base where there would be some elbow-room. Then hold that elbow-room against all comers until it was time to go.

After the base was once established, the brains of the party got to work. They turned the place inside out. They put it on tape and captured it within the chains of symbols they scribbled in their field books. They pictured it and wrote it and plotted it and reduced it to a neat assembly of keyed and symbolic facts to be inserted in the galactic files.

If there was life, and sometimes there was, they prodded it to get reaction. Sometimes the reaction was extremely violent, and other times it was much more dangerously subtle. But there were ways in which to handle both the violent and the subtle, for the legionnaires and their robotics were trained to a razor's edge and knew nearly all the answers.

There was nothing in the galaxy, so far known, that could stop a human survey party.

**TOM DECKER** sat at ease in the empty lounge and swirled the ice in the highball glass, well contented, watching the first of the robots emerge from the bowels of the cargo space. They dragged a conveyor belt behind them as they emerged and Decker, sitting idly, watched them drive supports into the ground and rig up the belt.

A door clicked open back of Decker and he turned his head.

"May I come in, sir?" Doug Jackson asked.

"Certainly," said Decker.

Jackson walked to the great curving window and looked out. "What does it look like, sir?" he asked.

Decker shrugged. "Another job," he said. "Six weeks. Six months. Depends on what we find."

Jackson sat down beside him. "This one looks tough," he said. "Jungle worlds always are a bit meaner than any of the others."

Decker grunted at him. "A job.

That's all. Another job to do. Another report to file. Then they'll either send out an exploitation gang or a pitiful bunch of bleating colonists."

"Or," said Jackson, "they'll file the report and let it gather dust for a thousand years or so."

"They can do anything they want," Decker told him. "We turn it in. What someone else does with it after that is their affair, not ours."

They sat quietly watching the six robots roll out the first of the packing cases, rip off its cover and unpack the seventh robot, laying out his various parts neatly in a row in the tramped-down, waist-high grass. Then, working as a team, with not a single fumble, they put No. 7 together, screwed his brain case into his metal skull, flipped up his energizing switch and slapped the breastplate home.

No. 7 stood groggily for a moment. He swung his arms uncertainly, shook his head from side to side. Then, having oriented himself, he stepped briskly forward, helped the other six heave the packing box containing No. 8 off the conveyor belt.

"Takes a little time this way," said Decker, "but it saves a lot of space. Have to cut our robot crew in half if we didn't pack them at the end of every job. They stow away better."

He sipped at his highball speculatively. Jackson lit a cigarette.

"Someday," said Jackson, "we're going to run up against something that we can't handle."

Decker snorted.

"Maybe here," insisted Jackson, gesturing at the nightmare jungle world outside the great curved sweep of the vision plate.

"You're a romanticist," Decker told him shortly. "In love with the

unexpected. Besides that, you're new. Get a dozen trips under your belt and you won't feel this way."

"It could happen," insisted Jackson.

DECKER NODDED, almost sleepily. "Maybe," he said. "Maybe it could, at that. It never has, but I suppose it could. And when it does, we take it on the lam. It's no part of our job to fight a last ditch battle. When we bump up against something that's too big to handle, we don't stick around. We don't take any risks."

He took another sip.

"Not even calculated risks," he added.

The ship rested on the top of a low hill, in a small clearing masked by tall grass, sprinkled here and there with patches of exotic flowers. Below the hill a river flowed sluggishly, a broad expanse of chocolate-colored water moving in a sleepy tide through the immense vine-entangled forest.

As far as the eye could see, the jungle stretched away, a brooding darkness that even from behind the curving quartz of the vision plate seemed to exude a heady, musty scent of danger that swept up over the grass-covered hilltop. There was no sign of life, but one knew, almost instinctively, that sentiency lurked in the buried pathways and tunnels of the great tree-land.

Robot No. 8 had been energized and now the eight split into two groups, ran out two packing cases at a time instead of one. Soon there were twelve robots and then they formed themselves into three working groups.

"Like that," said Decker, picking up the conversation where they had left it lying. He gestured with his glass, now empty. "No calculated risks. We send the robots first. They

unpack and set up their fellows. Then the whole gang turns to and uncrates the machinery and sets it up and gets it operating. A man doesn't even put his foot on the ground until he has a steel ring around the ship to give him protection."

Jackson sighed. "I guess you're right," he said. "Nothing can happen. We don't take any chances. Not a single one."

"Why should we?" Decker asked. He heaved himself out of the chair, stood up and stretched. "Got a thing or two to do," he said. "Last minute checks and so on."

"I'll set here for a while," said Jackson. "I like to watch. It's all new to me."

"You'll get over it," Decker told him. "In another twenty years."

IN HIS office, Decker lifted a sheaf of preliminary reports off his desk and ran through them slowly, checking each one carefully, filing away in his mind the basic facts of the world outside.

He worked stolidly, wetting a big, blunt thumb against his outthrust tongue to flip the report pages off the top of the next stack and deposit them, in not so neat a pile to his right, face downward.

Atmosphere—Pressure slightly more than Earth. High in oxygen.

Gravity—A bit more than Earth.

Temperature—Hot. Jungle worlds always were. There was a breeze outside now, he thought. Maybe there'd be a breeze most of the time. That would be a help.

Rotation—Thirty-six hour day.

Radiation—None of local origin, but some hard stuff getting through from the sun.

He made a mental note: Watch that.

Bacterial and virus count—As usual. Lots of it. Apparently not too

dangerous. Not with every single soul hypoed and immunized and hormoned to his eyebrows. But you never can be sure, he thought. Not entirely sure. No calculated risks, he had told Jackson. But here was a calculated risk and one you couldn't do a single thing about. If there was a bug that picked you for a host and you weren't loaded for bear to fight him, you took him on and did the best you could.

Life factor—Lot of emanation. Probably the vegetation, maybe even the soil, was crawling with all sorts of loathsome life. Vicious stuff, more than likely. But that was something you took care of as a matter of routine. No use taking any chances. You went over the ground even if there was no life—just to be sure there wasn't.

A tap came on the door and he called out for the man to enter.

It was Captain Carr, commander of the Legion unit.

**C**ARR SALUTED snappily. Decker did not rise, made his answering salute a sloppy one on purpose. No use, he told himself, letting the fellow establish any semblance of equality, for there was no such equality in fact. A captain of the Legion simply did not rank with the commandant of a galactic survey party.

"Reporting, sir," said Carr. "We are ready for a landing."

"Fine, Captain. Fine."

What was the matter with the fool? The Legion always was ready, always would be ready—that was no more than tradition. Why, then, carry out such an empty, stiff formality?

But it was the nature of a man like Carr, he supposed. The Legion, with its rigid discipline, with its ancient pride of service and tradition, attracted men like Carr, was a perfect

finishing school for accomplished martinets.

Tin soldiers, Decker thought, but accomplished ones. As hard-bitten a gang of fighting men as the galaxy had ever known. They were drilled and disciplined to a razor's edge, serum- and hormone-injected against all known diseases of an alien world, trained and educated in alien psychology and strictly indoctrinated with high survival characteristics which stood up under even the most adverse circumstances.

"We shall not be ready for some time, Captain," Decker said. "The robots have just started their uncrating."

"Very well," said Carr. "We await your orders, sir."

"Thank you, Captain," Decker told him, making it quite clear that he wished he would get out. But when Carr turned to go, Decker called him back.

"What is it, sir?" asked Carr.

"I've been wondering," said Decker. "Just wondering, you understand. Can you imagine any circumstance which might arise that the Legion could not handle?"

Carr's expression was a pure delight to see. "I'm afraid, sir, that I don't understand your question."

Decker sighed. "I didn't think you would," he said.

**B**EFORE nightfall, the full working force of robots had been uncrated and had set up some of the machines, enough to establish a small circle of alarm posts around the ship.

A flame thrower burned a barren circle on the hilltop, stretching five hundred feet around the ship. A hard radiations generator took up its painstaking task, pouring pure death into the soil. The toll must have been terrific. In some spots the ground virtually boiled as the dying life

forms fought momentarily and fruitlessly to escape the death that cut them down.

The robots rigged up huge batteries of lamps that set the hilltop ablaze with a light as bright as day, and the work went on.

As yet, no human had set foot outside the ship.

Inside the ship, the robot stewards set up a table in the lounge so that the human diners might see what was going on outside the ship.

The entire company, except for the legionnaires who stayed in quarters, had gathered for the meal when Decker came into the room.

"Good evening, gentlemen," he said.

He strode to the table's head and the others ranged themselves along the sides. He sat down and there was a scraping of drawn chairs as the others took their places.

He clasped his hands in front of him and bowed his head and parted his lips to say the customary words. He halted even as he was about to speak, and when the words did come they were different than the ones he had said by rote a thousand times before.

"Dear Father, we are Thy servants in an unknown land and there is a deadly pride upon us. Teach us humility and lead us to the knowledge, before it is too late, that men, despite their far traveling and their mighty works, still are as children in Thy sight. Bless the bread we are about to break, we beg Thee, and keep us forever in Thy compassion. Amen."

He lifted his head and looked down the table. Some of them, he saw, were startled. The others were amused.

They wonder if I'm cracking, he thought. They think the Old Man is breaking up. And that may be true, for all I know. Although I was all right until this afternoon. All right until young Doug Jackson...

"Those were fine words, lad," said Old MacDonald, the chief engineer. "I thank you for them, sir, and there is them among us who would do well to take some heed upon them."

Platters and plates were being passed up and down the table's length and there was the commonplace, homely clatter of silverware and china.

"This looks an interesting world," said Waldron, the anthropologist. "Dickson and I were up in observation just before the sun set. We thought we saw something down by the river. Some sort of life."

DECKER GRUNTED, scooping fried potatoes out of a bowl onto his plate. "Funny if we don't run across a lot of life here. The radiation wagon stirred up a lot of it when it went over the field today."

"What Waldron and I saw," said Dickson, "looked humanoid."

Decker squinted at the biologist. "Sure of that?" he asked.

Dickson shook his head. "The seeing was poor. Couldn't be absolutely sure. Seemed to me there were two or three of them. Matchstick men."

Waldron nodded. "Like a picture a kid would draw," he said. "One stroke for the body. Two strokes each for arms and legs. A circle for a head. Angular. Ungraceful. Skinny."

"Graceful enough in motion, though," said Dickson. "When they moved, they went like cats. Flowed, sort of."

"We'll know plenty soon enough," Decker told them mildly. "In a day or two we'll flush them."

Funny, he thought. On almost every job someone popped up to report he had spotted humanoids. Usually there weren't any. Usually it was just imagination. Probably wishful thinking, he told himself, the yen of men far away from their fellow men to

find in an alien place a type of life that somehow seemed familiar.

Although the usual humanoid, once you met him in the flesh, turned out to be so repulsively alien that alongside him an octopus would seem positively human.

Franey, the senior geologist, said, "I've been hinking about those mountains to the west of us, the ones we caught sight of when we were coming in. Had a new look about them. New mountains are good to work in. They haven't worn down. Easier to get at whatever's in them."

"We'll lay out our first survey lines in that direction," Decker told him.

Outside the curving vision plate, the night was alive with the blaze of the batteries of lights. Gleaming robots toiled in shining gangs. Ponderous machines lumbered past. Smaller ones scurried like frightened beetles. To the south, great gouts of flame leaped out and the sky was painted red with the bursts of a squad of flame throwers going into action.

"Chewing out a landing field," said Decker. "A tongue of jungle juts out there. Absolutely level ground. Like a floor. Won't take a great deal of work to turn it into a field."

The stewards brought coffee and brandy and a box of good cigars. Decker and his men settled back into their chairs, taking life easy, watching the work going on outside the ship.

"I hate this waiting," Franey said, settling down comfortably to his cigar.

"Part of the job," said Decker. He poured more brandy in his coffee.

**BY DAWN** the last machines were set up and either had been moved out to their assigned positions or were parked in the motor pool. The flamers had enlarged the burned over area and three radiation wagons were

busy on their rounds. To the south, the airfield had been finished and the jets were lined up and waiting in a plumb-straight row.

Some of the robots, their work done for the moment, formed themselves in solid ranks to form a solid square, neat and orderly and occupying a minimum of space. They stood there in the square, waiting against the time when they would be needed, a motor pool of robots, a reservoir of manpower.

Finally the gangplank came down and the legionnaires marched out in files of two, with clank and glitter and a remorseless precision that put machines to shame. There were no banners and there were no drums, for these are useless things and the Legion, despite its clank and glitter, was an organization of ruthless efficiency.

The column wheeled and became a line and the line broke up and the platoons moved out toward the planet-head perimeter. There, machines and legionnaires and robots manned the frontier Earth had set up on an alien world.

Busy robots staked out and set up an open air pavilion of gaudily-striped canvas that rippled in the breeze, placed tables and chairs beneath its shade, moved in a refrigerator filled with beer and with extra ice compartments.

It finally was safe and comfortable for ordinary men to leave the shelter of the ship.

Organization, Decker told himself—organization and efficiency and leaving not a thing to chance. Plug every loophole before it became a loophole. Crush possible resistance before it developed as resistance. Gain absolute control over a certain number of square feet of planet and operate from there.

Later, of course, there were certain



chances taken; you just couldn't eliminate them all. There would be field trips and even with all the precautions that robot and machine and legionnaire could offer, there would be certain risks. There would be aerial survey and mapping, and these, too, would have elements of chance, but with these elements reduced to the very minimum.

And always there would be the base, an absolutely safe and impregnable base to which a field party or a survey flight could retreat, from which reinforcements could be sent out or counter-action taken.

Foolproof, he told himself. As foolproof as it could be made.

HE WONDERED briefly what had been the matter with him the night before. It had been that young fool, Jackson, of course—a capable biochemist, possibly, but certainly the wrong kind of a man for a job like this. Something had slipped up; the screening board should have stopped a man like Jackson, should have spotted his emotional instability. Not that he could do any actual harm, of course, but he could be upsetting. An irritant, said Decker. That is what he is. Just an irritant.

Decker laid an armload of paraphernalia on the long table underneath the gay pavilion. From it he selected a rolled-up sheet of map paper, unrolled it, spread it flat and thumbtacked it at four corners. On it a portion of the river and the mountains to the west had been roughly penciled in. The base was represented by an X-ed through square—but the rest of it was blank.

But it would be filled in; as the days went by it would take on shape and forms.

From the field to the south a jet whooshed into the sky, made a lazy turn and straightened out to streak

toward the west. Decker walked to the edge of the pavilion's shade and watched it as it dwindled out of sight. That would be Jarvis and Donnelly, assigned to the preliminary survey of the southwest sector between the base and the western mountains.

Another jet rose lazily, trailing its column of exhaust, gathered speed and sprang into the sky. Freeman and Johns, he thought.

Decker went back to the table, pulled out a chair and sat down. He picked up a pencil and tapped it idly on the almost-blank map paper. Behind his back he heard another jet whoom upward from the field.

He let his eyes take in the base. Already it was losing its raw, burned-over look. Already it had something of the look of Earth about it, of the efficiency and common sense and get-the-job-done attitude of the men of Earth.

Small groups of men stood around talking. One of them, he saw, was squatted on the ground, talking something over with three squatting robots. Others of them walked around, sizing up the situation.

Decker grunted with satisfaction. A capable gang of men, he thought. Most of them would have to wait around to really get down to work until the first surveys came in, but even while they waited they would not be idle.

They'd take soil samples and test them. The life that swarmed in the soil would be captured and brought in by grinning robots and the squirming, vicious things would be pinned down and investigated...photographed, X-rayed, dissected, analyzed, observed, put through reaction tests. Trees and plants and grasses would be catalogued and attempts made to classify them. Test pits would be dug for a look at soil strata. The river's water would be analyzed. Seines

would dredge up some of the life they held. Wells would be driven to establish water tables.

**A**LL OF this here, at the moment, while they waited for the first preliminary flights to bring back data that would pinpoint other areas worthy of investigation.

Once those reports were in, the work would be started in dead earnest. Geologists and mineral men would probe into the planet's hide. Weather observation points would be set up. Botanists would take far-ranging check samples. Each man would do the work for which he had been trained. Field reports would pour back to the base, there to be correlated and fit into the picture.

Work then, work in plenty. Work by day and night. And all the time the base would be a bit of Earth, a few square yards held inviolate against all another world might muster.

Decker sat easily in his chair and felt the breeze that came beneath the canvas, a gentle breeze that ruffled through his hair, rattled the papers on the table and twitched the tacked-down map. It was pleasant here, he thought. But it wouldn't stay pleasant long. It almost never did.

Someday, he thought, I'll find a pleasant planet, a paradise planet where the weather's always perfect and there is food for the picking of it and natives that are intelligent to talk with and companionable in other ways...and I will never leave it. I'll refuse to leave when the ship is ready to blast off. I'll live out my days in a fascinating corner of a lousy galaxy—a galaxy that is gaunt with hunger and mad with savagery and lonely beyond all that may be said of loneliness.

He looked up from his reverie and saw Jackson standing at the pavilion's

edge, watching him.

"What's the matter, Jackson?" Decker asked with sudden bitterness. "Why aren't you—"

"They're bringing in a native, sir," said Jackson, breathlessly. "One of the things Waldron and Dickson saw."

**T**HE NATIVE was humanoid, but he was not human.

As Waldron and Dickson had said, he was a match-stick man, a flesh and blood extension of a drawing a four-year-old might make. He was black as the ace of spades and he wore no clothing, but the eyes that looked out of the pumpkin-shaped head at Decker were bright with a light that might have been intelligence.

Decker tensed as he looked into those eyes. Then he looked away, saw the men standing silently around the pavilion's edge, silent and waiting, tense as he was.

Slowly Decker reached out his hand to one of the two headsets of the mentograph. His fingers closed over it and for a moment he felt a vague, but forceful reluctance to put it on his head. It was disturbing to contact, or attempt to contact, an alien mind. It gave one a queasy feeling in the pit of the stomach. It was a thing, he thought, that Man never had been intended to do—an experience that was utterly foreign to any human background.

He lifted the headset slowly, fitted it over his skull, made a sign toward the second set.

For a long moment the alien eyes watched him, the creature standing erect and motionless.

Courage, thought Decker. Raw and naked courage, to stand there in this suddenly unfamiliar environment that had blossomed almost overnight on familiar ground, to stand there mo-

tionless and erect, surrounded by creatures that must look as if they had dropped from some horrible nightmare.

The humanoid took one step closer to the table, reached out a hand and took the headset. Fumbling with its unfamiliarity, he clamped it on his head. And never for a moment did the eyes waver from Decker's eyes, always alert and watchful.

Decker forced himself to relax, tried to force his mind into an attitude of peace and calm. That was a thing you had to be careful of. You couldn't scare these creatures—you had to lull them, quiet them down, make them feel your friendliness. They would be upset, and a sudden thought, even a suggestion of human brusqueness would wind them up tighter than a drum.

There was intelligence here, he told himself, being careful to keep his mind unruffled, a greater intelligence than one would think looking at the creature. Intelligence enough to know that he should put on the headset, and guts enough to do it.

**H**E CAUGHT the first faint mental whiff of the match-stick man, and the pit of his stomach contracted suddenly and there was an ache around his chest. There was nothing in the thing he caught, nothing that could be put to words, but there was an alienness, as a smell is alien. There was a non-human connotation that set one's teeth on edge. He fought back the gagging blackness of repulsive disgust that sought to break the smooth friendliness he held within his mind.

"We are friendly," Decker forced himself to think. "We are friendly. We are friendly. We are friendly. We are friendly. We are—"

"You should not have come," said the thought of the match-stick man.

"We will not harm you," Decker

thought. "We are friendly. We will not harm you. We will not harm—"

"You will never leave," said the humanoid.

"Let us be friends," thought Decker. "Let us be friends. We have gifts. We will help you. We will—"

"You should not have come," said the match-stick thought. "But since you are here, you can never leave."

Humor him, thought Decker to himself. Humor him.

"All right, then," he thought. "We will stay. We will stay and we will be friendly. We will stay and teach you. We will give you the things we have brought for you and we will stay with you."

"You will not leave," said the match-stick man's thought, and there was something so cold and logical and matter-of-fact about the way the thought was delivered, that Decker suddenly was cold.

The humanoid meant it—meant every word he said. He was not being dramatic, nor was he blustering—but neither was he bluffing. He actually thought that the humans would not leave, that they would not live to leave the planet.

Decker smiled softly to himself.

"You will die here," said the humanoid thought.

"Die?" asked Decker. "What is die?"

The match-stick man's thought was pure disgust. Deliberately, he reached up and took off the headset, laid it carefully back upon the table.

Then he turned and walked away and not a man made a move to stop him.

Decker took off his headset, slammed it on the table top.

"Jackson," he said, "pick up that phone and tell the Legion to let him through. Let him leave. Don't try to stop him."

He sat limply in his chair and looked at the ring of faces that was watching him.

Waldron asked, "What is it, Decker?"

"He sentenced us to death," said Decker. "He said that we would not leave the planet. He said that we would die here."

"Strong words," said Waldron.

"He meant them," Decker said.

He lifted a hand, flipped it wearily. "He doesn't know, of course," he said. "He really thinks that he can stop us leaving. He thinks that we will die."

**I**T WAS an amusing situation, really. That a naked humanoid should walk out of the jungle and threaten to do away with a human survey party, that he should really think that he could do it. That he should be so positive about it.

But there was not a single smile on any of the faces that looked at Decker.

"We can't let it get us," Decker said.

"Nevertheless," Waldron declared, "we should take all precautions."

Decker nodded. "We'll go on emergency alert immediately," he said. "We'll stay that way until we're sure...until we're..."

His voice trailed off. Sure of what? Sure that an alien savage who wore no clothing, who had not a sign of culture about him, could wipe out a group of humans protected by a ring of steel, held within a guard of machines and robots and a group of fighting men who knew all there was to know concerning the refinements of dealing out swift and merciless extermination to anything that moved against them?

Ridiculous!

Of course it was ridiculous!

And yet the eyes had held intel-

ligence. The being had not only intelligence, but courage. He had stood within a circle of—to him—alien beings, and he had not flinched. He had faced the unknown and said what there was to say and then had walked away with a dignity any human would have been proud to wear. He must have guessed that the alien beings within the confines of the base were not of his own planet, for he had said that they should not have come and his thought had implied that he was aware they were not of this world of his. He had understood that he was supposed to put on the headset, but whether that was an act more of courage than of intelligence one would never know—for you could not know if he had realized what the headset had been for. Not knowing, the naked courage of clamping it to his head was of an order that could not be measured.

"What do you think?" Decker asked Waldron.

"We'll have to be careful," Waldron told him evenly. "We'll have to watch our step. Take all precautions now that we are warned. But there's nothing to be scared of, nothing we can't handle."

"He was bluffing," Dickson said. "Trying to scare us into leaving."

Decker shook his head. "I don't think he was," he said. "I tried to bluff him and it didn't work. He's just as sure as we are."

**T**HE WORK went on. There was no attack.

The jets roared out and thrummed away, mapping the land. Field parties went out cautiously. They were flanked by robots and by legionnaires and preceded by lumbering machines that knifed and tore and burned a roadway through even the most stubborn of the terrain they went up against. Radio weather sta-

tions were set up at distant points and at the base the weather tabulators clicked off on tape the data that the stations sent back.

Other field parties were flown into the special areas pinpointed for more extensive exploration and investigation.

And nothing happened.

The days went past.

The weeks went past.

The machines and robots watched and the legionnaires stood ready and the men hurried with their work so they could get off the planet.

A bed of coal was found and mapped. An iron range was discovered. One area in the mountains to the west crawled with radioactive ores. The botanists found twenty-seven species of edible fruit. The base swarmed with animals that had been trapped as specimens and remained as pets.

And a village of the match-stick men was found.

It wasn't much of a place. Its huts were primitive. Its sanitation was non-existent. Its people were peaceful.

Decker left his chair under the striped pavilion to lead a party to the village.

The party entered cautiously, weapons ready but being very careful not to move too fast, not to speak too quickly, not to make a motion that might be construed as hostile.

The natives sat in their doorways and watched them. They did not speak and they scarcely moved a muscle. They simply watched the humans as they marched to the center of the village.

There the robots set up a table and placed a mentograph upon it. Decker sat down in a chair and put one of the headsets on his skull. The rest of the party waited off to one side. Decker waited at the table.

They waited for an hour and not

a native stirred. None came forward to put on the other headset.

Decker took off the headset wearily and placed it on the table.

"It's no use," he said. "It won't work. Go ahead and take your pictures. Do anything you wish. But don't disturb the natives. Don't touch a single thing."

HE TOOK a handkerchief out of his pocket and mopped his steaming face.

Waldron came and leaned on the table. "What do you make of it?" he asked.

Decker shook his head. "It haunts me," he said. "There's just one thing that I am thinking. It must be wrong. It can't be right. But the thought came to me and I can't get rid of it."

"Sometimes that happens," Waldron said. "No matter how illogical a thing may be, it sticks with a man, like a burr inside his brain."

"The thought is this," said Decker. "That they have told us all that they have to tell us. That they have nothing more they wish to say to us."

"That's what you thought," said Waldron.

Decker nodded. "A funny thing to think," he said. "Out of clear sky. And it can't be right."

"I don't know," said Waldron. "Nothing's right here. Notice that they haven't got a single iron tool. Not a scrap of metal in evidence at all. Their cooking utensils are stone, a sort of funny stuff like soapstone. What few tools they have are stone. And yet they have a culture. And they have it without metal."

"They're intelligent," said Decker. "Look at them watching us. Not afraid. Just waiting. Calm and sure of themselves. And that fellow who came into the base. He knew what

to do with the headset."

Waldron sucked thoughtfully at a tooth. "We better be getting back to base," he said. "It's getting late." He held his wrist in front of him. "My watch has stopped. What time do you have, Decker?"

Decker lifted his arm and Waldron heard the sharp gasp of his indrawn breath. Slowly, Decker raised his head, looked at the other man.

"My watch has stopped, too," he said and his voice was scarcely louder than a whisper.

For a moment they were graven images, shocked into immobility by a thing that should have been no more than an inconvenience. Then Waldron sprang erect from the table, whirled to face the men and robots.

"Assemble!" he shouted. "Back to the base. Quick!"

The men came running. The robots fell into place. The column marched away. The natives sat quietly in their doorways and watched them as they left.

DECKER SAT in his camp chair and listened to the canvas of the pavilion snapping softly in the wind, alive in the wind, talking and laughing to itself. A lantern, hung on a ring above his head, swayed gently, casting fleeting shadows that seemed at times to be the shadows of living, moving things. A robot stood stiffly and quietly beside one of the pavilion poles.

Stolidly, Decker reached out a finger and stirred the little pile of wheels and springs that lay upon the table.

Sinister, he thought.

Sinister and queer.

The guts of watches, lying on the table.

Not of two watches alone, not only his and Waldron's watches, but many other watches from the wrists of

other men. All of them silent, stilled in their task of marking time.

Night had fallen hours before, but the base still was astir with activity that was at once feverish and furtive. Men moved about in the shadows and crossed the glaring patches of brilliance shed by the batteries of lights set up by the robots many weeks before. Watching the men, one would have sensed that they moved with a haunting sense of doom. Would have known as well that they knew, deep in their inmost hearts, that there was no doom to fear. No definite thing that one could put a finger on and say this is the thing to fear. No direction that one might point and say doom lies here, waiting to spring upon us.

Just one small thing.

Watches had stopped running.

And that was a simple thing for which there must be some simple explanation.

Except, thought Decker, on an alien planet no occurrence, no accident or incident, can be regarded as a simple thing for which a simple explanation must necessarily be anticipated. For the matrix of cause and effect, the mathematics of chance, may not hold true on an alien planet as they hold true on Earth.

There was one rule, Decker thought grimly.

One rule: Take no chances.

That was the one safe rule to follow, the only rule to follow.

Following it, he had ordered all field parties back to base, had ordered the crew to prepare the ship for emergency takeoff, had alerted the robots to be ready at an instant to get the machines aboard. To even be prepared to desert the machines and leave without them if "circumstances should dictate that such was necessary.

**H**AVING DONE that, there was no more to do but wait. Wait until the field parties came back from their advance camps. Wait until some reason could be assigned to the failure of the watches.

It was not a thing, he told himself, that should be allowed to panic one. It was something to recognize, not to disregard. It was a circumstance that made necessary a certain number of precautions, but it was not a situation that should make one lose all sense of proportion.

You could not go back to Earth and say: "Well, you see, our watches stopped and so—"

A footstep sounded and he swung around in his chair. It was Jackson.

"What is it, Jackson?" Decker asked.

"The camps aren't answering, sir," said Jackson. "The operator has been trying to raise them and there is no answer. Not a single peep."

Decker grunted. "Take it easy," he said. "They will answer. Give them time."

He wished, even as he spoke, that he could feel some of the assurance that he tried to put into his voice. For a second, a rising terror mounted in his throat and he choked it back.

"Sit down," he said. "We'll sit here and have a beer and then we'll go down to the radio shack and see what's doing."

He rapped on the table. "Beer," he said. "Two beers."

The robot standing by the pavilion pole did not answer.

He made his voice louder.

The robot did not stir.

Decker put his clenched fists upon the table and tried to rise, but his legs suddenly were cold and had turned unaccountably to water and he could not raise himself.

"Jackson," he panted, "go and tap that robot on the shoulder. Tell him

we want some beer."

He saw the fear that whitened Jackson's face as he rose and moved slowly forward. Inside himself, he felt the terror start and worry at his throat.

Jackson stood beside the robot and reached out a hesitant hand, tapped him gently on the shoulder, tapped him harder—and the robot fell flat upon its face!

Feet hammered across the hard-packed ground, heading for the pavilion.

Decker jerked himself around, sat foursquare and solid in his chair, waiting for the man who ran.

It was MacDonald, the chief engineer.

**H**E HALTED in front of Decker and his hands, scarred and grimy with years of fighting balky engines, reached down and gripped the boards of the table's edge. His seamy face was twisted as if he were about to weep.

"The ship, sir. The ship..."

Decker nodded, almost idly. "I know, Mr. MacDonald. The ship won't run."

MacDonald gulped. "The big stuff's all right, sir. But the little gadgets...the injector mechanism... the—"

He stopped abruptly and stared at Decker. "You knew," he said. "How did you know?"

"I knew," said Decker, "that someday it would come. Not like this, perhaps. But in any one of several ways. I knew that the day would come when our luck would run too thin. I talked big, like the rest of you, of course, but I knew that it would come. The day when we'd covered all the possibilities but the one that we could not suspect and that, of course, would be the one that would ruin us."



He was thinking: The natives had no metal. No sign of any metal in their village, at all. Their dishes were soapstone and they wore no ornaments. Their implements were stone. And yet they were intelligent enough, civilized enough, cultured enough, to have fabricated metal. For there was metal here, a great deposit of it in the western mountains. They had tried perhaps, many centuries ago. Had fashioned metal tools and had them go to pieces underneath their fingers in a few short weeks.

A civilization without metal. A culture without metal. It was unthinkable. Take metal from a man and he went back to the caves. Take metal from a man and he was earthbound and his bare hands were all he had.

Waldron came into the pavilion, walking quietly in the silence. "The radio is dead," he said, "and the robots are dying like flies. The place is littered with them, just so much scrap metal."

Decker nodded. "The little stuff, the finely fabricated, will go first," he said. "Like watches and radio innards and robot brains and injector mechanisms. Next, the generators will go and we will have no lights or power. Then the machines will break down and the Legion's weapons will be no more than clubs. After that the big stuff, probably."

"The native told us," Waldron said, "when you talked to him. 'You will never leave,' he said."

"We didn't understand," said Decker. "We thought he was threatening us and we knew that we were too big, too well guarded for any threat of his to harm us. He wasn't threatening us at all, of course. He was just telling us."

**H**E MADE a hopeless gesture with his hands. "What is it?"

"No one knows," said Waldron

quietly. "Not yet, at least. Later we may find out, but it won't help us any. A microbe, maybe. A virus. Something that eats iron after it has been subjected to heat or alloyed with other metals. It doesn't go for iron ore. If it did, that deposit we found would have been gone long ago."

"If that is true," said Decker, "we've brought it the first square meal its had in a long, long time. A thousand years. Maybe a million years. There is no fabricated metal here. How would it survive? Without stuff to eat, how would it live?"

"I wouldn't know," said Waldron. "It might not be a metal-eating organism at all. It might be something else. Something in the atmosphere."

"We tested the atmosphere."

But, even as the words left his mouth, Decker saw how foolish they were. They had tested the atmosphere, but how could they have detected something they had never run across before? Man's yardstick was limited—limited to the things he knew about, limited by the circle of his own experience.

He guarded himself against the obvious and the imaginable. He could not guard himself against the unknowable or the unimaginable.

Decker rose and saw Jackson still standing by the pavilion pole, with the robot stretched at his feet.

"You have your answer," he told the biochemist. "Remember that first day here? You talked with me in the lounge."

Jackson nodded. "I remember, sir."

And suddenly, Decker realized, the entire base was quiet.

A gust of wind came out of the jungle and rattled the canvas.

Now, for the first time since they had landed, he caught in the wind the alien smell of an alien world.

THE END

# THE UNIVERSE OF HOYLE

By  
John Fletcher

★  
NO MORE captivating experience exists than the study of cosmology. The guesses, estimates, theories, hypotheses which have concerned the nature of the Universe are enormous in number, but in our time, the only serious ones have been those on which every science-fiction fan has cut his eye teeth, the writings of Sir Arthur Eddington and Sir James Jeans—those brilliant astrophysicists who literally formulated the science of cosmology.

But their work has limitations, and while they carried the human mind into the rarified realms of interstellar and inter-galactic space, they never succeeded in giving an over-all picture. That has remained for the astounding announcement of two brilliant young British mathematicians, Hoyle and Lyttleton. These young scientists have published a small new book which attempts, from rigid mathematical and physical analysis, to deduce the origin and nature of the Universe. It is cosmology with a capital "C".

They have this to say on origin. Imagine the universe in the beginning (there really is no beginning, middle or end) as consisting of hydrogen gas uniformly distributed—and very thinly. It so happens that such a distribution is what is called "gravitationally lacking stability." The hydrogen atoms start to coalesce, attract to each other and form clouds which gather much as liquid drops on a cold glass. As these clouds roam through their hydrogen filled space they accumulate more and more hydrogen atoms. Eventually they form gigantic clouds which constitute the building matter of the galaxies.

As time goes on, the clouds contract, getting hotter and hotter. The center becomes tremendously hot, hot enough for atom reaction to start and the nuclear hydrogen-helium cycle then begins. Gigantic quantities of energy are released in the form of radiation. Such nuclei are the stars, like our own sun. Left alone they would continue to "burn" their hydrogen to radiation.

But they are not left alone. Since they're moving through space, they sweep it like a broom gathering unto themselves more and more hydrogen, feeding their atomic furnaces. When they become large enough

they blow up, shattering into other stars and the prime-stuff of planets. The whole affair is exceedingly complicated.

This is just a beginning, of course; the two mathematical astro-physicists go through the entire field of cosmology giving exceedingly rational explanations of most phenomena, explanations which tie in quite well with present knowledge. Physicists and astronomers are still shocked by the completeness of the treatment.

But what is more important about this theory, perhaps, is the fact that it does not predict that hoary old belief held for so long that the universe is degrading and "running down," that it will come to an eventual "heat-death." Instead, Hoyle and Lyttleton see a process of continuous creation, with stars dying, being born and going through their life-cycles all the time! This is an amazing concept if it is true, and the mathematical and observational evidence now available seems to support it. This is, indeed, a much happier picture of the universe than we've held. The hydrogen scattered through space continually refuels the stars, and they go on forever. Furthermore, the two theoretical astronomers predict the existence of large numbers of planets in confirmation of another theory which said the same. Thus the chances are that life is widely scattered on planetary systems formed by the near-collision of two stars.

The new theories are sweeping Britain like wild-fire and their technical book has gone through the fantastic sale (for a technical book) of sixty thousand copies. This shows the tremendous public interest in cosmology and the nature of the universe. It is a pleasure to think that rational scientific study is appreciated after the recent outburst of idiotic pseudo-science which has apparently sold so well.

It is satisfying to know that there are two astronomers interested primarily in cosmology. Since the death of Jeans and Eddington, this abstruse field has remained rather barren, most astronomers tackling instead the less complicated and tortuous channels of conventional work. Someday, perhaps, the names of Hoyle and Lyttleton will be as famous as those of Eddington and Jeans!

## Don't miss: "EXCALIBUR AND THE ATOM" by Theodore Sturgeon

This is a story of Merlin, the boy who used to hang around King Arthur's court. Now he returns, to the America of today, for a weird and unholy purpose.

August FANTASTIC ADVENTURES on sale June 19



"This is the history of Man," the Voice said. "Five hundred thousand years..."

# WITNESS FOR THE DEFENSE



**Not everyone agrees that our world must end in chaos. Here is a simple statement of faith:**

*By Paul W. Fairman*

Dear Editor:

In the June issue of *FANTASTIC ADVENTURES*, there appeared an excellent story by Bill McGivern entitled "Conditioned Reflex".

The story represented what I call the pessimistic school of thought relative to humanity. This is in direct opposition, of course, to the optimistic school. Bill's story, with all its merits,

ends upon a note of cynical hopelessness. And sadly, from my point of view, he makes it sound most convincing.

While I'm sure you have no wish to turn the pages of *FA* into a forum on the pro and con of the subject, I feel the optimistic school should be given its moment upon the witness stand. I present, for this reason, "Wit-

*ness For The Defense", and ask that it be noted, so marked, and placed in the record.*

*Paul W. Fairman*

\* \* \*

OVER BEYOND the railroad tracks in the shelter of an old deserted tool shed, the world was on trial. The judge was a grinning half-wit named Bargy—a nondescript who sat on a packing box and leered into a fire of split rail-ties.

The prosecuting attorney had, in his time, saved nine men from the gallows. In other days he had been the brilliant J. Franklin Parkhurst. But that had been a thousand quarts ago. The first initial had long since been dropped. The Parkhurst had disappeared with his last clean shirt. All that now remained was Franky—and the ability to revert temporarily when the liquor hit him just right.

The attorney for the defense had had a church somewhere in his dim, misty past. Vague memories of its white steeple came back at times to blot out momentarily the bleak stretches of empty box cars. His name was Soft Joe. Where he'd gotten it no one knew nor cared.

Why these three should have met this chilly night to accuse and defend the world is as inexplicable as what had sent them down the long road toward oblivion—and probably as unimportant.

The trial began when Franky tipped the joint whisky bottle, passed it to Soft Joe, and said, "Your Honor, the prosecution will prove beyond the shadow of a doubt that the world deserves the supreme penalty—that it is not fit to exist in the great society of planets."

Soft Joe, squatting on the other side of the fire, took his turn at the bottle and said, "On the contrary, Your Honor, the defense will prove the prosecution has no grounds for its

accusations; no evidence other than rumor and the circumstantial."

Bargy grinned like a fool. "I sure do like to hear you fellers talk them big words. I sure do."

Franky pulled up the collar of his thin coat. "Will Your Honor please throw some more wood on the fire so we can start the trial?"

"Sure—sure." Bargy hopped out into the gloom and came back with a fragment of tie. He threw it into the flames and got back on his box grinning with pleasure.

"Now, who starts first, you guys?"

"It is customary for the prosecution to open the trial, Your Honor."

"Okay, that's you, Franky."

"Your Honor must ask the clerk to call the first witness."

Bargy writhed like an abused dog being given a modicum of kindness. "Okay, clerk, call the first witness."

Franky hunched down further into his ragged coat. "I ask that Judas Iscariot be called to the stand." Then he pointed into the gloom; pointed a long finger, white in the semi-darkness. "You—Judas Iscariot—do you swear to tell the truth the whole truth and nothing but the truth?"

Bargy's poor brain clouded. His voice was plaintive. "I don't see nobody, you guys."

Franky sprang to his feet, indignant. "Can't see him? Great heaven! Are you blind? Can't you see him standing there in all his monumental rottenness and guilt? Can't you see the blood on his hands—the sacred blood dripping from those thirty pieces of silver."

"Naw," Bargy whimpered. "I can't see nothing."

Soft Joe looked out through his alcoholic haze. "Don't be harsh with the poor unfortunate, Franky. He suffers from the curse of his own existence."

Bargy turned eagerly to his de-

fender. "You call one. You call one now. I'll look hard."

"I ask that Abraham Lincoln be brought to the stand."

Bargy's right eye slanted upward. His efforts to pierce the gloom were ludicrous, pitiful; pitiful as his twisted stance and sidwinding hop.

"Can't you see him, Bargy?" Soft Joe asked. "Think of all the people who ever gave you a break. Think of the cop who didn't club you; the housewife who gave you food; the children who didn't laugh."

"Ya know, you guys—I think I can—I think—"

"Irrelevant," Franky snapped. "Immaterial. Call me two witnesses—Rasputin and Benedict Arnold."

An icy gush of wind whirled around the corner of the shed and whipped the flames aside, revealing the red-hot skeletons of wood. Soft Joe tipped the bottle and let the heat gush down his throat. He handed it to Bargy. "Warm your ribs, boy."

Bargy drank, gagged, passed the bottle on. "Whadda they look like—this Ras—Ras—"

"Like evil triumphant, Your Honor. Look not upon their persons, but into their black hearts. A world capable of producing such specimens is but a cancerous growth in the clean universe. It should be destroyed now."

Soft Joe shivered and said, "Call up St. Francis of Assisi, Alexander Hamilton, Joan of Arc."

"Blackbeard the pirate and Geronimo," Franky countered.

"Booker T. Washington and Madame Curie."

"Caesar, Attila the Hun."

"Martin Luther, William Shakespeare."

A train whistle moaned far away. Bargy looked ready to burst into tears. "Aw—I can't see any o' them guys."

Franky said, "The hell with it," as

he hunched closer to the fire.

Tears came to Bargy's eyes. "Naw—don't stop. Please don't stop, you guys. I like it sitting here. I don't want to quit."

"It's late and the bottle is empty. We'll sum up."

"Sure—do that—what you said."

"Your Honor, corruption flourishes in the cities of earth. Hoodlums and gangsters find honor in the public eye. Crime and government are interlocked. War and bloodshed flourish. Every man has dishonesty in his heart. They are all of—"

Soft Joe said, "I refute that last. Every man does not have dishonesty in his heart."

"There isn't a man in this nation who wouldn't get a traffic ticket fixed if the opportunity presented itself. Is that bottle completely empty?"

"Yes. But a traffic ticket is a small thing."

"So is the point of a bayonet on the end of a rifle, but it pierces the hearts of men. Your Honor, I ask for a verdict of guilty."

"May I testify for the defense?"

The voice came from the shadows by the shed. The three looked up and saw a dark form in the furthest perimeter of the firelight. Their first instinct was fear. An arm of the law. The foot of a railroad dick.

Bargy got down from his box. He said, "Hey, you guys—I can see him." Bargy crept closer.

"I have listened with interest," the stranger went on, "and I sense a most important point you have evidently overlooked. One which should not be overlooked. If I may, I will use the wall of this building upon which to illustrate."

The stranger, still but a shadow, stepped close to the wall of the shed. He stooped now to pick up a handful of earth. It trickled slowly through his fingers. "Back in the beginning,"

he said, "Man came first—from this. Please bear with me while I mark out a graph upon this wall."

He stretched forth his arm and drew a jagged line beginning at the extreme edge of the wall and tracing inward. When he had finished, the line was some six inches in length; an irregular graph with its end slightly higher than its beginning.

"The length of that line represents Man's entire history; his rises, his falls; his triumphs, his despairs. That six inches indicates five hundred thousand years."

The stranger waited, as though for comment. Words came only from Bargy who moved closer, then turned and grinned at his companions. "I can see this witness, you guys. I can see him fine."

Now the stranger moved in long strides to the far end of the wall, some fifteen feet away. There he blended with the night but his voice came clear: "And the length of this wall, gentlemen, represents the distance Man still must travel before his shining goal is reached. It marks the untold eras and ages during which he has yet—through trial and error, through effort, failure and success—to fulfill his destiny. So you can easily see that at present he is little more than a creeping infant."

There was a moment of silence while even the wind held motionless; while the flames of the fire, by some grotesque illusion, seemed frozen.

The voice went on cheerfully: "A half million years, gentlemen and yet—mark this—he already knows good from evil; right from wrong. All your human examples of what the earth has produced—no matter how low they sank, how high they soared—had that knowledge in common—the difference between right and wrong. Think, gentlemen—is that not remarkable progress for so frightened and

bewildered a creature? He knows not where he came from nor why. He knows not where he is going nor how. *But he knows right from wrong.*"

Now the wind blew and the fire writhed and Bargy said with the disappointment of a tired child: "Aw, he's gone. I can't see him no more."

But came a faint voice on the wind: "We should by all means allow the earth to continue its magnificent work."

It was cold again. Franky shivered. "I wonder why he left so suddenly. Who do you suppose he was?"

Soft Joe said, "Funny—I'm certain I heard that voice once—a long time ago."

"Here's a card he dropped, you guys—look."

"A calling card, I believe." Franky held out his hand. "Let me see it."

"No—lemme. I can read. I learnt to read good. Lemmie."

Bargy held the card close to the fire. He squinted at it importantly. "It's tore in half. Only the bottom left. There ain't no name, but it's got what business the guy's in and where he lives."

Soft Joe said, "Read it, Bargy."

"Gal—Gal—Galilee. Some tank town, I guess. I ain't never been there. And he's a carpenter, it says. But they ain't no phone."

Bargy dropped the card into the fire. "Come on. Let's play court some more. The Express ain't due for another twenty minutes. Let's kill time and do it again, huh?"

#### THE END

\* \* \*

*You have read both Bill McGivern's "Conditioned Reflex" and Paul Fairman's "Witness For The Defense". They represent the two extremes of a philosophical viewpoint, which is particularly important and timely to us today. What is YOUR opinion? . . . . . Ed.*



# CELESTIAL ROCK-CRUSHER

By

Jonathon  
Peterson

IT IS POSSIBLE under ideal conditions to detect the famous "zodiacal light," a thin band of luminescence in the sky. Astronomers have known for a long time this was caused by large amounts of very fine dust permeating the Solar System—its particles encircling the Sun like miniature planets. It has been recently theorized that the source of this dust is the Asteroid Belt inside the orbit of Mars. The asteroids, millions of them, are in effect a sort of rock-crusher grinding their component particles into fine dust which diffuses throughout the System. Reflection of sunlight by this dust layer accounts for the weird appearance of the zodiacal light.

Dust, surprisingly enough, plays a rather important and interesting role in the System's phenomena. The Moon, for example, is laden with it. It has been estimated that the surface of Luna is covered several inches deep with fine dust, due primarily to meteoric action. Some astronomers believe that in addition to this layer there is a very deep layer of powdery dust caused simply by the alternate expansion and contraction of the pumice-

like surface of the Moon under the fierce heating of the Sun and the rapid cooling of radiation. When Man is finally able to "splash" projectiles against the Moon's surface, he'll discover whether or not this dust hypothesis is true.

Recently astronomers observed a large cloud of what was believed to be dust on Mars. This was presumed to have been caused by the splashing of a large meteor against the Martian rocks. Again that is only guess-work, but it is highly logical. The thin air of Mars would do little to impede the progress or velocity of a large meteor and the resulting "splash" would be quite impressive and readily visible in a large scope.

The dust clouds which obscure certain portions of the sky and are known to exist in interstellar space eventually will give, by serious study, more clues to the origin of the universe. Astronomers are especially interested in the behavior of these dust-clouds because they wish to learn more about the primal dust cloud which they believe originally constituted the stuff of which the universe was made. Dust is

## "SCIENCE and LIFE"

By

William Karney

WHAT American science and technology have done for us is thoroughly recognized by the world. In some respects our inventions and our industry have had a greater influence than our political or military intervention. If anything, the future will double this recognition. Deeds and actions speak much louder than words.

One of the unique characteristics of modern America is the abundance of amateur technicians. Practically every American at one time or another has some kind of a technical hobby. He may whittle wood or he may make things in a complete machine shop in his basement. A good deal of this hobbying on his part is due to the influence of the tremendous number of magazines devoted to amateur scientific and craftsman work. We have more "how-to-do-it" magazines and books appearing each month, than the entire rest of the world. And science-fiction magazines, the top ones especially, run numerous short technical articles which seem to find a response among many people.

As a result of this intense absorption in things mechanical, the average Amer-

ican is familiar with almost any kind of gadget or machine. The mechanical civilization holds no mysteries for us.

But many foreign countries are beginning to realize this and are climbing aboard the band-wagon. As an example, a new Italian publication has appeared called "Scienza e Vita" (Science and Life) which endeavors to imitate its American predecessors. It contains articles on every conceivable technical advance from jets to a new kitchen gadget.

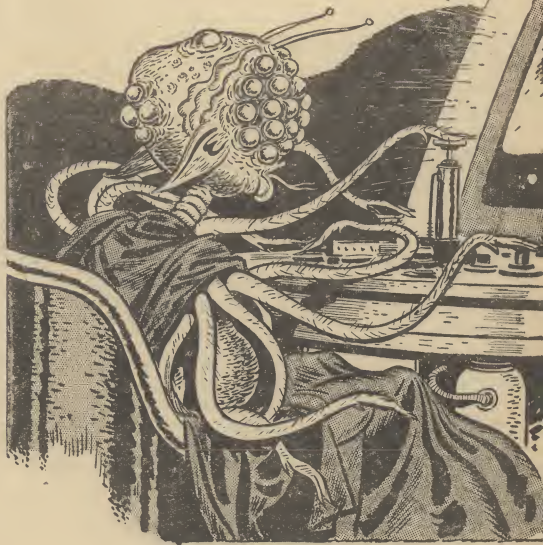
This is indeed a healthy portent for the future. When we can wake up the rest of the world to a realization of the value of an educated citizenry, we may make some headway in enabling them to raise their rather limited living standards. We wish "Scienza e Vita" luck in its efforts, and while they have a long way to go, at least they're on the right track.

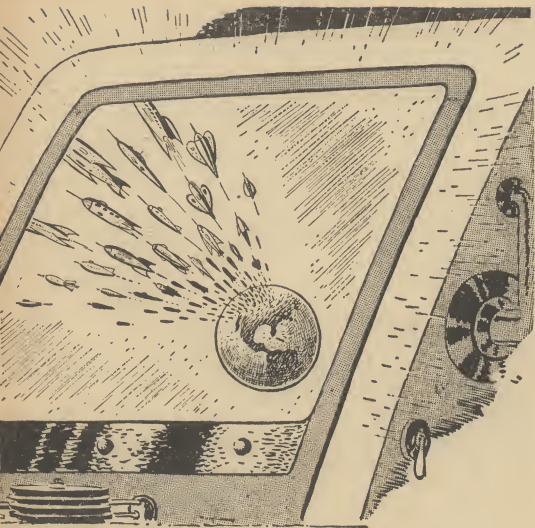
One of the blessings of America is the fact that any American, anywhere, can get hold of a book or magazine that will tell him exactly how to build whatever he wants—and which stops only short of the atomic bomb!

# MISSION DEFERRED

*By Walt Sheldon*

The aliens knew that Earth was not aware of their presence, and yet, at the zero hour the victims suddenly attacked!





The creature stared into the viewplate as the fleet left the planet's surface...

**G**ERALD FINCH, holding his clip-board tightly to his chest, paused before entering Control. If he hadn't paused like that Renfield might not have caught him. Renfield came from another door just down the hall, and his heels clicked on the shiny blue linoleum as he came.

"Oh—Gerald. Just a minute before you go in—"

Gerald turned, forced a mask over his face and said, "Yes, sir?"

Gerald was essentially a young man,

but not too young for his job. He was not yet thirty. The lines of his face weren't deep, and in fact except for some air wrinkles from his flying days about his gray eyes, they were practically non-existent. He was slender, perhaps a little nervously slender, and there was a lick of hair that wouldn't stay put.

He towered over Renfield, but Renfield had a way of squaring his shoulders and lifting his chin. Man of power. Renfield also had sharp blue

eyes, radar eyes. At fifty or so there wasn't yet a trace of weariness in them. "Gerald," he said quietly, "there's no use going into details. We've gone over the details in—uh—great detail."

"Yes, sir," said Gerald. "So we have."

"I don't have to tell you again how important today's operation is going to be."

"No, sir."

"You know that all things depend on it."

"More or less everything," said Gerald. "Yes, I know that."

Renfield frowned, and his lips fumbled for words. At least he was sincere; Gerald had to admit that in this moment, anyway, he was sincere. "I'm not in the habit," said Renfield, "of making corny pep talks. I—I just thought if I could get to you before you start—wish you luck perhaps—"

Gerald smiled then. He was certain Renfield had thought out this little speech, even the pauses. Somehow the idea made him relax. Maybe, in a devious way, Renfield's little pep talk *would* do some good. Lord knew, relaxation was what Gerald needed. Strain . . . tautness . . . stiffness . . . worry . . . these had been the factors behind his poor work there in Control . . .

Gerald put his hand out, Renfield took it, and then Gerald said, "Thanks. I'll go to work now. We'll see."

He turned quickly, pushed the heavy door open and went into the lock-chamber.

\* \* \*

High in space, Turan concentrated on a sliding pointer that traversed a curved scale on the panel. The ship was well insulated so that very little sound from the electrograv power

plant reached the interior. It was quiet—quiet and bright; the whole cabin glowed with the strong, greenish light from which both Turan and Heldikkon received their energy. Heldikkon was leaning over Turan's shoulder.

Perhaps, strictly, it could not be called a shoulder. Just as the fibriloids on which both creatures moved could not be called legs, or the light-sensitive cross-hatched areas here and there on their bodies, eyes.

"It seems incredible," Turan telepathed, "that they use such an inefficient means of communication." He was always skeptical, and even a little sour by nature. "But the evidence is strong."

"Naturally," said Heldikkon. "I compiled the evidence."

Turan glanced at him. He had never been able to achieve a desirable egotism, such as his second in command possessed. Others admired egotism like that, but Turan was essentially a modest soul and couldn't quite force himself to brag. Perhaps that was why, after all these *nards* of service, he was still in command of a mere scout cruiser on an observation mission to a vastly inferior planet—this third one from the dwarf star in Sector Olegon. Heldikkon had just the right sort of egotism; Heldikkon was still young. He would go far. "Well," said Turan, "at least I built the machine. At least I remembered enough of my childhood toys to put the circuit together." It was a half-hearted attempt at a boast.

Heldikkon laughed, clapped him on the shoulder and said, "It may not work."

**T**URAN ALMOST said now, it may not—but checked himself. Actually he was sure it would. It was a sim-

ple device; wire to pick up the low frequency waves, coils to transmit them from circuit to circuit, controlled by an elementary grid arrangement in the stream of electrons, and then a mere oscillating circuit to send them out again, through anodes, in the form of intelligible, modulated microwaves. Intelligible because the speech patterns of this planet had been picked up by the sound-converters and analyzed for meaning by other observation missions many *nards* ago.

Turan set the first pointer, then slid another into place. Parts of the mechanism began to glow. Slowly, slowly, the emanations came to their brains, seeping at first, and then flowing—

They leaned forward, both of them.

"...alert," said the voice from Earth. "Blue alert...all sectors. Stand by thirty seconds for Red alert, and orders. Acknowledge by commands."

"North American Continental, Roger," another voice answered.

"South America, Roger," said a second—pronouncing it *Roh-hair*.

"Europe, Roger."

"Africa, Roger."

"Asia One, Asia Two and South Pacific, Roger."

There was a curious singing noise, a kind of heterodyning and in this pause Heldikkon said to Turan, "We're in luck! We've got one of their military operations! This should give us a fine estimate of their strength—and—er—it shows how clever I was to think of this method."

"Maybe," said Turan sourly. "Maybe. Though I don't see what good any additional information'll be. We know they're primitive. I've recommended an attack as soon as possible." He turned to the receiver again.

The singing noise stopped and the original voice they had heard said, "Red alert! Here are your instruc-

tions. Follow them to the letter and with an error of no more than one second in any case. Coordination is of the utmost importance—I can't remind you of that too strongly."

Heldikkon and Turan looked at each other. Coordination was not one of the virtues they had thus far observed in Earth's military establishment.

The voice continued. "All penetration rockets of North American Continental will blast off at optimum synergy—on e-seven-three-zero Greenwich. At Escape Velocity, plus seventeen course will be altered from Sun Mean precisely nine degrees, three minutes and forty-four seconds. North American, repeat all numerals, please."

While North American's voice repeated, Heldikkon and Turan traded stares again. Heldikkon started to say, "But I thought they didn't have—"

Turan shushed him quickly.

The receiver went on: "Upon sighting extra-terrestrial invader, North American Group will fire sun-blots as deliberate misses, but close enough for invader to observe. One hundred eighty degree turn will then be made to determine if invader wishes to open hostilities. South American, European and African units will meanwhile surround invader by taking the following courses, while Asian unit remains in reserve. Attention, South America—here's your course—"

Again a series of directions.

Heldikkon's and Turan's fibrilloids vibrated in great agitation. Both of them. The younger backed away a little, trying to send out thought emanations to his superior officer, but generating only confusion—and even fright.

Turan rose. He was the commander, after all. In spite of his unpopular modesty, he had the experience of

long command, and he was the one to handle a crisis. "Turn on the intercom waves," he said. He kept his voice calm.

"Yes, sir," said Heldikkon, and obeyed.

"Relay the following order to the pile rooms and to all personnel aboard," said Turan. He held himself upright, confident and firm upon his fibrilloids. "Course—Home Sector. Full warp. Attack imminent by overwhelming Earth force. Retreat is necessary."

Heldikkon relayed the order, then turned to his commander and said, "It was the wise thing. I wouldn't have had the courage to retreat."

"Courage," snapped Turan, "has nothing to do with it. It's merely important that I get this report of Earth's strength back to headquarters—it would be suicide to attack."

"Yes, sir," said Heldikkon, but he watched admiringly as his commander turned to the console to take over for the long journey....

**G**ERALD FINCH came wearily from the lock between the hall and Control. He still held his clip-board, but the papers on it were torn and crumpled now. His shirt sleeves were rolled. His collar was loose, his tie hung limp. His coat was over his arm. The sweat came in great drops down his forehead, was caught for a moment by his eyebrows, and dropped finally to his nose or cheeks.

Renfield was waiting in the hall.

Gerald had known he would be waiting, of course. It wasn't quite over in there yet—but Gerald's part of it was done. Done badly—Gerald knew this. He could hear the last phrases of the thing murmuring in the hall speaker by the door.

Renfield was kind enough about it; on the surface, anyway. He put a hand on Gerald's shoulder and said, "I'm sorry. The truth is, Gerald, you're not cut out for this."

Gerald squared his shoulders suddenly. Something in Renfield's remark—not cut out for this—abruptly cleared everything in his mind. Made truth shine. Of course. He should have known this all along. He looked directly into Renfield's sharp blue eyes and said, "All right, so it stank. But I'm glad it did. You know why? This forces me to go off and take a crack at that novel I've been wanting to do. Actually, laying an egg tonight was the best thing that could have happened to me!"

Renfield was shocked. "To *you*? How can you think of yourself at a time like this! The whole organization depended on your pleasing that prospective sponsor tonight, and—"

The dial to the hall speaker was near Gerald's hand. Smiling, he turned it up full blast to drown out his boss—his ex-boss.

"You have just heard," said the speaker, "another thrilling drama of the future in the series *TIME AND SPACE*, written and produced by Gerald Finch. Tonight's drama, entitled *DEFENSE OF THE PLANET*, featured—"

Renfield turned it off angrily. "Defense of the Planet!" he yelled. "Defense of Nothing! It wouldn't have convinced even a little three year old kid—it wouldn't have fooled anybody!"

But Gerald Finch was already halfway down the hall whistling, and feeling free for the first time in many a *nard*.

THE END

## THE SHRINKING PLANET

By Dale Lord

USUALLY in any sort of technological innovations, the United States doesn't take a beat seat; rather, it leads the world. Unfortunately, however, apparently for inexplicable reasons, in the matter of future air transport, we've lagged sadly. In fact in the whole field of jet engines, the U. S. has taken a back seat to Great Britain, from whom we are buying jet engines, planning to build them here of British design.

To understand this peculiar turn of technical events, it is necessary to realize that most of the airliners flying in the world today were built, engines and airframes, in the U. S. We have an enormous prestige in air travel and most foreign countries commonly use American airplanes in their airlines.

The plodding British, wise and resourceful, realized at the end of the Second World War, that the aircraft of the future was the jet-powered plane, which in time would gravitate into some form of rocket driven craft. Therefore that country set about designing and producing such airplanes. American manufacturers with their lucrative business swollen with long delayed post-war orders from everywhere, decided to take the cash and let the credit go. In addition, it must be added in fairness, that unlike the British our aircraft companies in peacetime were not subsidized as were the British.

The upshot of all this is in the announcement that some time during this year the British will open a regular jet transport service between Britain and Australia. At present the time in the air is a matter of about sixty-seven hours. With jet liners, that time will be nearly cut in half to a mere *thirty-six* hours! American manufacturers, their future efforts somewhat curtailed by the present re-armament will never catch up it seems. Naturally upon demonstration of the success of the jet airliner, those lucrative foreign orders for planes will gravitate to the best, in this case the British. And we, too, will undoubtedly buy from those factories.

Better than anything, this example shows how one can never rest on one's technological laurels. Science is international and advances at a rate which transcends any barriers of skill (assumed), nationality or pride. The British are carrying the ball in air travel. It is only left for us to catch up. Get on the ball, manufacturers—we want the age of rocketry to be American!

## PREVIEW OF CREATION!

By Lee Owens

SOME TIME ago this magazine reported, in a more or less casual manner, on a new type of Wilson Cloud Chamber, one of the primary tools of the physicist and one of the most interesting. It is the one device which makes the world of atomic phenomena real and seeable. But unfortunately we didn't stress the extraordinary qualities of this gadget, which would appeal not only to a person interested in physics, but to anyone interested in the marvels of science. In addition, this tool, which is an important contribution to physics, can be built at home by anyone, without recourse to elaborate machinery or equipment. And knowing the nature of science-fiction readers, we feel that a more elaborate explanation is warranted.

The new cloud chamber which is capable of showing the trails of cosmic ray particles as well as electrons and protons, is the very model of simplicity. You start with a pan filled with chunks or small pieces of dry ice. On top of this you place a metal disk (any kind of metal, though copper would be best) and cover the disk with a sheet of black velvet. On top of this, you place a glass cylinder, open at both ends (it could be made by cutting off the top and bottom of a bottle or jar,) and about five to ten inches in diameter. Then you top this with a second metal disk to whose bottom another piece of velvet cloth is cemented. You soak this top piece of velvet in alcohol, place it over the open-mouthed cylinder and then put a pan of water on top of the metal disk to seal it against the cylinder. Presto! There's your cloud chamber. Shine a flashlight through the side and you will see the trails formed by atomic particles. Some patience may be required to get the right height of cylinder, etc., but the results will be well worth the effort.

Ordinary expansion cloud chambers are tricky and require just the right operation, in addition to being almost instantaneous devices, while this chamber is always set and ready to capture nuclear tracks. In addition, of course, the ease of construction—anyone can build it—recommends it highly.

We suspect that there will be a rash of such experimentation once the news becomes more widely diffused. True, no great advances in experimental techniques will result from amateurs' efforts, but the thrill of capturing pictures of atomic phenomena is completely captivating!





# THE TRAVELING CRAG

*By Theodore Sturgeon*

**Why would a successful author arouse the hatred of an entire village? Could it be because he was deathly afraid — of nothing?**



“I KNOW agents who can get work out of their clients,” said the telephone acidly.

“Yes, Nick, but—”

“Matter of fact, I know agents who would be willing to drop everything and go out to that one-shot genius’s home town and—”

“I did!”

“I know you did! And what came of it?”

“I got a new story. It came in this morning.”

“You just don’t know how to handle a real writer. All you have to do is—you what?”

“I got a new story. I have it right here.”

A pause. “A new Sig Weiss story? No kidding?”

“No kidding.”

The telephone paused a moment again, as if to lick its lips. “I was saying to Joe just yesterday that if there’s an agent in town who can pry work out of a prima-donna like Weiss,

it's good old Crisley Post. Yes, sir. Joe thinks a lot of you, Cris. Says you can take a joke better than—how long is the story?"

"Nine thousand."

"Nine thousand. I've got just the spot for it. By the way, did I tell you I can pay an extra cent a word now? For Weiss, maybe a cent and a half."

"You hadn't told me. Last time we talked rates you were overstocked. You wouldn't pay more than—"

"Aw, now, Cris, I was just—"

"Goodbye, Nick."

"Wait! When will you send—"

"Goodbye, Nick."

It was quiet in the office of Crisley Post, Articles, Fiction, Photographs. Then Naome snickered.

"What's funny?"

"Nothing's funny. You're wonderful. I've been waiting four years to hear you tell an editor off. Particularly that one. Are you going to give him the story?"

"I am not."

"Good! Who gets it? The slicks? What are you going to do: sell it to the highest bidder?"

"Naome, have you read it?"

"No. I gave it to you as soon as it came in. I knew you'd want to—"

"Read it."

"Wh—now?"

"Right now."

She took the manuscript and carried it to her desk by the window.

"Corny title," she said.

"Corny title," he agreed.

**H**E SAT glumly, watching her. She was too small to be so perfectly proportioned, and her hair was as soft as it looked, which was astonishing. She habitually kept him at arm's length, but her arms were short. She was loyal, arbitrary, and underpaid, and she ran the business, though neither of them would admit it aloud. He

thought about Sig Weiss.

Every agent has a Sig Weiss—as a rosy dream. You sit there day after day paddling through oceans of slush, hoping one day to run across a manuscript that means something—sincerity, integrity, high word rates—things like that. You try to understand what editors want in spite of what they say they want, and then you try to tell it to writers who never listen unless they're talking. You lend them money and psychoanalyze them and agree with them when they lie to themselves. When they write stories that don't make it, it's your fault. When they write stories that do make it, they did it by themselves. And when they hit the big time, they get themselves another agent. In the meantime, nobody likes you.

"Real stiff opening," said Naome.

"Real stiff," Cris nodded.

And then it happens. In comes a manuscript with a humble little covering note that says, "This is my first story, so it's probably full of mistakes that I don't know anything about. If you think it has anything in it, I'll be glad to fix it up any way you say." And you start reading it, and the story grabs you by the throat, shakes your bones, puts a heartbeat into your lymph ducts and finally slams you down gasping, weak and oh so happy.

So you send it out and it sells on sight, and the editor calls up to say thanks in an awed voice, and tells an anthologist, who buys reprint rights even before the yarn is published, and rumors get around, and you sell radio rights and TV rights and Portuguese translation rights. And the author writes you another note that claims volubly that if it weren't for you he'd never have been able to do it.

That's the agent's dream, and that was Cris Post's boy Sig Weiss and *The Travelling Crag*. But, like all

dream plots, this one contained a sleeper. A rude awakening.

Offers came in and Cris made promises, and waited. He wrote letters. He sent telegrams. He got on the long distance phone (to a neighbor's house, Weiss had no phone).

No more stories.

SO HE WENT to see Weiss. He lost six days on the project. It was Naome's idea. "He's in trouble," she announced, as if she knew for sure. "Anyone who can write like that is sensitive. He's humble and he's generous and he's probably real shy and real goodlooking. Someone's victimized him, that's what. Someone's taken advantage of him. Cris, go on out there and find out what's the matter."

"All the way out to Turnville? My God, woman, do you know where that is? Besides, who's going to run things around here?" As if he didn't know.

"I'll try, Cris. But you've got to see what's the matter with Sig Weiss. He's the—the greatest thing that ever happened around here."

"I'm jealous," he said, because he was jealous.

"Don't be silly," she said, because he wasn't being silly.

So out he went. He missed connections and spent one night in a depot and had his portable typewriter stolen and found he'd forgotten to pack the brown shoes that went with the brown suit. He brushed his teeth once with shaving cream and took the wrong creaking rural bus and had to creak in to an impossibly authentic small town and creak out again on another bus. Turnville was a general store with gasoline pumps outside and an abandoned milk shed across the road, and Cris wasn't happy when he got there. He went into the general store to ask questions.

The proprietor was a triumph of type-casting. "Whut c'n I dew f'r you, young feller? Shay—yer f'm the city, ain't cha? Heh!"

Cris fumbled vaguely with his lapels, wondering if someone had pinned a sign on him. "I'm looking for someone called Sig Weiss. Know him?"

"Sure dew. Meanest bastard ever lived. Wouldn't have nought to dew with him, I was you."

"You're not," said Cris, annoyed. "Where does he live?"

"What you want with him?"

"I'm conducting a nation-wide survey of mean bastards," Cris said. "Where does he live?"

"You're on the way to the right place, then. Heh! You show me a man's friends, I'll tell you what he is."

"What about his friends?" Cris asked, startled.

"He ain't got any friends."

Cris closed his eyes and breathed deeply. "Where does he live?"

"Up the road a piece. Two mile, a bit over. That way."

"Thanks."

"He'll shoot you," said the proprietor complacently, "but don't let it worry you none. He loads his shells with rock salt."

CRIS WALKED the two miles and a bit, every uphill inch. He was tired, and his shoes were designed only to carry a high shine and make small smudges on desk tops. It was hot until he reached the top of the mountain, and then the cool wind from the other side made him feel as if he was carrying sacks of crushed ice in his armpits. There was a galvanized tin mailbox on a post by the road with S. WEISS and advanced erosion showing on its ancient sides. In the cut-bank near it were some shallow footholds. Cris sighed and started up.

There was a faint path writhing its

way through heavy growth. Through the trees he could see a canted shingle roof. He had gone about forty feet when there was a thunderous explosion and shredded greenery settled about his head and shoulders. Sinking his teeth into his tongue, he turned and dove head first into a tree-bole, and the lights went out.

A fabulous headache was fully conscious before Cris was. He saw it clearly before it moved around behind his eyes. He was lying where he had fallen. A rangy youth with long narrow eyes was squatting ten feet away. He held a ready shotgun under his arm and on his wrist, while he deftly went through Cris's wallet.

"Hey," said Cris.

The man closed the wallet and threw it on the ground by Cris's throbbing head. "So you're Crisley Post," said the man, in a disgusted tone of voice.

Cris sat up and groaned. "You're—you're not Sig Weiss?"

"I'm not?" asked the man pugnaciously.

"Okay, okay," said Cris tiredly. He picked up his wallet and put it away and, with the aid of the tree trunk, got to his feet. Weiss made no move to help him, but watchfully rose with him. Cris asked, "Why the artillery?"

"I got a permit," said Weiss. "This is my land. Why not? Don't go blaming me because you ran into a tree. What do you want?"

"I just wanted to talk to you. I came a long way to do it. If I'd known you'd welcome me like this, I wouldn't've come."

"I didn't ask you to come."

"I'm not going to talk sense if I get sore," said Cris quietly. "Can't we go inside? My head hurts."

Weiss seemed to ponder this for a moment. Then he turned on his heel, grunted, "Come," and strode toward the house. Cris followed painfully.

A GRAY CAT slid across the path and crouched in the long grass. Weiss appeared to ignore it, but as he stepped by, his right leg lashed out sidewise and lifted the yowling animal into the air. It struck a tree trunk and fell, to lie dazed. Cris let out an indignant shout and went to it. The cat cowered away from him, gained its feet and fled into the woods, terrified.

"Your cat?" asked Weiss coldly.

"No, but damn if—"

"If it isn't your cat, why worry?" Weiss walked steadily on toward the house.

Cris stood a moment, shock and fury roiling in and about his headache, and then followed. Standing there or going away would accomplish nothing.

The house was old, small, and solid. It was built of fieldstone, and the ceilings were low and heavy beamed. Overlooking the mountainside was an enormous window, bringing in a breathtaking view of row after row of distant hills. The furniture was rustic and built to be used. There was a fireplace with a crane, also more than ornamental. There were no drapes, no couch covers or flamboyant upholstery. There was comfort, but austerity was the keynote.

"May I sit down?" Cris asked caustically.

"Go ahead," said Weiss. "You can breathe, too, if you want to."

Cris sat in a large split-twig chair that was infinitely more comfortable than it looked. "What's the matter with you, Weiss?"

"Nothing the matter with me."

"What makes you like this? Why the chip on your shoulder? Why this shoot-first-ask-questions-afterward attitude? What's it get you?"

"Gets me a life of my own. Nobody bothers me but once. They don't come back. You won't."

"That's for sure," said Cris fervently. "But I wish I knew what's eating you. No normal human being acts like you do."

"That's enough," said Weiss very gently, and Cris knew how very seriously he meant it. "What I do and why is none of your business. What do you want here, anyhow?"

"I came to find out why you're not writing. That's my business. You're my client, remember?"

"You're my agent," he said. "I like the sound of it better that way."

CRIS MADE an olympian effort and ignored the remark. "*The Traveling Crag* churned up quite a stir. You made yourself a nice piece of change. Write more, you'll make more. Don't you like money?"

"Who doesn't? You got no complaints out of me."

"Fine. Then what about some more copy?"

"You'll get it when I'm good and ready."

"Which is how soon?"

"How do I know?" Weiss barked.

"When I feel like it, whenever that is."

Cris talked, then, at some length. He told Weiss some of the ins and outs of publishing. He explained how phenomenal it was that a pulp sale should have created such a turmoil, and pointed out what could be expected in the slicks and Hollywood. "I don't know how you've done it, but you've found a short line to the heavy sugar. But the only way you'll ever touch it is to write more."

"All right, all right," Weiss said at last. "You've sold me. You'll get your story. Is that what you wanted?"

"Not quite." Cris rose. He felt better, and he could allow himself to be angry now that the business was taken care of. "I still want to know how a guy like you could have written a sto-

ry like *The Traveling Crag* in a place like this."

"Why not?"

Cris looked out at the rolling blue distance. "That story had more sheer humanity in it than anything I've ever read. It was sensitive and—damn it—it was a *kind* story. I can usually visualize who writes the stuff I read; I spend all my time with writing and writers. That story wasn't written in a place like this. And it wasn't written by a man like you."

"Where was it written?" asked Weiss in his very quiet voice. "And who wrote it?"

"Aw, put your dukes down," said Cris tiredly, and with such contempt that he apparently astonished Weiss. "If you're going to jump salty over every little thing that happens, what are you going to do when something big comes along and you've already shot your bolt?"

WEISS DID not answer, and Cris went on: "I'm not saying you didn't write it. All I'm saying is that it reads like something dreamed up in some quiet place that smelled like flowers and good clean sweat... Some place where everything was right and nothing was sick or off balance. And whoever wrote it suited that kind of a place. It was probably you, but you sure have changed since."

"You know a hell of a lot, don't you?" The soft growl was not completely insulting, and Cris felt that in some obscure way he had scored. Then Weiss said, "Now get the hell out."

"Real glad to," said Cris. At the door, he said, "Thanks for the drink."

When he reached the cutbank, he looked back. Weiss was standing by the corner of the house, staring after him.

Cris trudged back to the crossroads called Turnville and stopped in at the

general store. "Shay," said the proprietor. "Looks like a tree reached down and whopped ye. Heh!"

"Heh!" said Cris. "One did. I called it a son of a beech."

The proprietor slapped his knee and wheezed. "Shay, that's a good 'un. Come out back, young feller, while I put some snake oil on your head. Like some cold beer?"

Cris blessed him noisily. The snake oil turned out to be a benzocaine ointment that took the pain out instantly, and the beer was a trans-fusion. He looked at the old man with new respect.

"Had a bad time up on the hill?" asked the oldster.

"No worse'n sharing an undershirt with a black widow spider," said Cris. "What's the matter with that character?"

"Nobuddy rightly knows," said the proprietor. "Came up here about eight years ago. Always been that way. Some say the war did it to him, but I knew him before he went overseas and he was the same. He jest don't like people, is all. Old Tom Sackett, drives the RFD wagon, he says Weiss was weaned off a gall-bladder to a bottle of vinegar. Heh!"

"Heh!" said Cris. "How's he live?"

"Gits a check every month. Some trust company. I cash 'em. Not much, but enough. He don't dew nahthin. Hunts a bit, roams these hills a hull lot. Reads. Heh! He's no trouble, though. Stays on his own reservation. Just don't want folks barrelin' in on him. Here comes yer bus."

"MY GOD!" said Naome.

"You're addressing me?" he asked.

She ignored him. "Listen to this: *Jets blasting, Bat Durston came screeching down through the atmosphere of Bbllzznaj, a tiny planet seven billion light years from Sol. He*

*cut out his super-hyper-drive for the landing...and at that point a tall, lean spaceman stepped out of the tail assembly, proton gun-blaster in a space-tanned hand.*

*'Get back from those contro's, Bat Durston,' the tall stranger lipiped thinly. 'You don't know it, but this is your last space trip.'*"

She looked up at him dazedly. "That's Sig Weiss?"

"That's Sig Weiss."

"The same 'Sig Weiss?"

"The very same. Leaf through that thing, Naome. Nine bloody thousand words of it, and it's all like that. Go on—read it."

"No," she said. It was not a refusal, but an exclamation. "Are you going to send it out?"

"Yes. To Sig Weiss. I'm going to tell him to roll it and stuff it up his shotgun. Honey, we have a one-shot on our hands."

"This is—it's impossible!" she blazed. "Cris, you can't give him up just like that. Maybe the next one... maybe you can... maybe you're right at that," she finished, glancing back at the manuscript.

He said tiredly, "Let's go eat."

"No. You have a lunch."

"I have?"

"With a Miss Tillie Moroney. You're quite safe. She's the Average American Miss; I mean it. She was picked out as such by pollsters last year. She's five-five, has had 2.3 years of college, is 24 years old, brown hair, blue eyes, and so on."

"How much does she weigh?"

"34B," said Naome, with instant understanding, "and presents a united front like a Victorian."

HE LAUGHED. "And what have I to do with Miss Tillie Moroney?"

"She's got money. I told you about her—that Personals ad in the Satur-



day Review—remember? ‘Does basic character ever change? \$1000 for authentic case of devil into saint.’ ”

“Oh my gosh yes. You had this bright idea of calling her in after I told you about getting the Weiss treatment in Turnville.” He waved at the manuscript. “Doesn’t that change your plans any? You might take a case out of *The Traveling Crag* versus the cat-kicking of Mr. Weiss, if you use that old man’s testimony that he’s been kicking cats and people for some years. But from my experience,” he touched his forehead, which was almost healed, “I’d say it was saint into devil.”

“Her ad didn’t mention temporary or permanent changes,” Naome pointed out. “There may be a buck in it. You can handle her.”

“Thanks just the same, but let me see what she looks like before I do any such thing. Personally, I think she’s a crank. A mystic maybe. Do you know her?”

“Spoke to her on the phone. Saw her picture last year. The Average American Miss is permitted to be a screwball. That’s what makes this country great.”

“You and your Machiavellian syndrome. Can’t I get out of it?”

“You cannot. What are you making such a fuss about? You’ve wined and dined uglier chicks than this.”

“I know it. Do you think I’d have a chance to see her if I acted eager?”

“I despise you,” said Naome. “Straighten your tie and go comb your hair. Oh, Cris, I know it sounds wacky. But what doesn’t, in this business? What’ll you lose? The price of a lunch!”

“I might lose my honor.”

“Authors’ agents have no honor.”

“As my friend in the general store is wont to remark: Heh! What protects you, little one?”

“My honor,” replied Naome.

THE BROWN hair was neat and so was the tailored brown suit that matched it so well. The blue eyes were extremely dark. The rest well befitted her Average Miss title, except for her voice, which had the pitch of a husky one while being clear as tropical shoals. Her general air was one of poised shyness. Cris pulled out a restaurant chair for her, which was a tribute; he felt impelled to do that about one time in seven.

“You think I’m a crank,” she said when they were settled with a drink.

“Do I?”

“You do,” she said positively. He did, too.

“Well,” he said, “your ad did make it a little difficult to suspend judgement.”

She smiled with him. She had good teeth. “I can’t blame you, or the eight hundred-odd other people who answered. Why is it a thousand dollars is so much more appealing than such an incredible thought as a change from basic character?”

“I guess because most people would rather see the change from a thousand dollars.”

He was pleased to find she had the rare quality of being able to talk coherently while she laughed. She said, “You are right. One of them wanted to marry me so I could change his character. He assured me that he was a regular devil. But—tell me about this case of yours.”

He did, in detail: Sig Weiss’s incredible short story, its wide impact, its deep call on everything that is fine and generous in everyone who read it. And then he described the man who had written it.

“In this business, you run into all kinds of flukes,” he said. “A superficial, tone-deaf, materialistic character will sit down and write something that positively sings. You read the story, you know the guy, and you say

he couldn't have written it. But you know he did. I've seen that time after time, and all it proves is that there are more facets to a man than you see at first—not that there's any real change in him. But Weiss—I'll admit that in his case the theory has got to be stretched to explain it. I'll swear a man like him simply could not contain the emotions and convictions that made *The Traveling Crag* what it is."

"I'VE READ it," she said. He hadn't noticed her lower lip was so full. Perhaps it hadn't been, a moment ago. "It was a beautiful thing."

"Now, tell me about this ad of yours. Have you found such a basic change—devil into saint? Or do you just hope to?"

"I don't know of any such case," she admitted. "But I know it can happen."

"How?"

She paused. She seemed to be listening. Then she said, "I can't tell you. I...know something that can have that effect, that's all. I'm trying to find out where it is."

"I don't understand that. You don't think Sig Weiss was under such an influence, do you?"

"I'd like to ask him. I'd like to know if the effect was at all lasting."

"Not so you'd notice it," he said glumly. "He gave me that bouncing around after he wrote *The Traveling Crag*, not before. Not only that..." He told her about the latest story.

"Do you suppose he wrote that under the same circumstances as *The Traveling Crag*?"

"I don't see why not. He's a man of pretty regular habits. He probably—wait a minute! Just before I left, I said something to him...something about..." He drummed on his temples. "...Something about the *Crag* reading as if it had been written in a different place, by a different person.

And he didn't get sore. He looked at me as if I were a swami. Seems I hit the nail right on the thumb."

The listening expression crossed her smooth face again. She looked up, startled. "Has he got any..." She closed her eyes, straining for something. "Has he a radio? I mean—a shortwave set—a transmitter—diathermy—a fever cabinet—any...uh...RF generator of any kind?"

"What in time made you ask that?"

She opened her eyes and smiled shyly at him. "It just came to me."

"Saving your presence, Miss Moroney, but there are moments when you give me the creeps," he blurted. "I'm sorry. I guess I shouldn't have said that, but—"

"It's all right," she said warmly.

"You hear voices?" he asked.

She smiled. "What about the RF generator?"

"I don't know." He thought hard. "He has electricity. I imagine he has a receiver. About the rest, I really can't say. He didn't take me on a grand tour. Will you tell me what made you ask that?"

"No."

HE OPENED his mouth to protest, but when he saw her expression he closed it again. She asked, "What are you going to do about Weiss?"

"Drop him. What else?"

"Oh, please don't!" she cried. She put a hand on his sleeve. "Please!"

"What else do you expect me to do?" he asked in some annoyance. "A writer who sends in a piece of junk like that as a followup to something like the *Crag* is more than foolish. He's stupid. I can't use a client like that. I'm busy. I got troubles."

"Also, he gave you a bad time."

"That hasn't anyth—well, you're right. If he behaved like a human being, maybe I would take a lot of trouble and analyze his trash and

guide and urge and wipe his nose for him. But a guy like that—nah!”

“He has another story like the *Crag* in him.”

“You think he has?”

“I know he has.”

“You’re very positive. Your... voices tell you that?”

She nodded, with a small secret smile.

“I have the feeling you’re playing with me. You know this Weiss?”

“Oh, no! And I’m not playing with you. Truly. You’ve got to believe me!” She looked genuinely distressed.

“I don’t see why I should. This begins to look real haywire, Tillie Moroney. I think maybe we’d better get down to basics here.” She immediately looked so worried that he recognized an advantage. Not knowing exactly what she wanted of him, he knew she wanted something, and now he was prepared to use that to the hilt. “Tell me about it. What’s your interest in Weiss? What’s this personality-alteration gimmick? What are you after and what gave you your lead? And what do you expect me to do about it? That last question reads, ‘What’s in it for me?’”

“Y—you’re not always very nice, are you?”

He said, more gently, “That last wasn’t thrown in to be mean. It was an appeal to your good sense to appeal to my sincerity. You can always judge sincerity—your own or anyone else’s—by finding out what’s in it for the interested party. Altruism and real sincerity are mutually exclusive. Now, talk. I mean, talk, please.”

**A** GAIN THAT extraordinary harking expression. Then she drew a deep breath. “I’ve had an awful time,” she said. “Awful. You can’t know. I’ve answered letters and phone calls. I’ve met cranks and wolves and religious fanatics who have neat little dialecti-

cal capsules all packed and ready to make saints out of devils. They all yap about proof—sometimes it’s themselves and sometimes it’s someone they know—and the proof always turns out to be a reformed drunk or a man who turned to Krishna and no longer beats his wife, not since Tuesday...” She stopped for breath and half-smiled at him and, angrily, he felt a warm surge of liking for her. She went on, “And this is the first hint I’ve had that what I’m looking for really exists.”

She leaned forward suddenly. “I need you. You already have a solid contact with Sig Weiss and the way he works—where he works. If I had to seek him out myself, I—well, I just wouldn’t know how to start. And this is urgent, can’t you understand—urgent!”

He looked deep into the dark blue eyes and said, “I understand fine.”

She said, “If I tell you a... story, will you promise not to ask me any questions about it?”

He fiddled about with his fork for a moment and then said, “I once heard tell of a one-legged man who was pestered by all the kids in the neighborhood about how he lost his leg. They followed him and yelled at him and tagged along after him and made no end of a nuisance of themselves. So one day he stopped and gathered them all around him and asked if they really wanted to know how he lost his leg, and they all chorused YES! And he wanted to know if he told them, would they stop asking him, and they all promised faithfully that they would stop. ‘All right,’ he said. ‘It was bit off.’ And he turned and stumped away. As to the promise you want—no.”

She laughed ruefully. “All right. I’ll tell you the story anyway. But you’ve got to understand that it isn’t the whole story, and that I’m not at liberty to tell the whole story. So please

don't pry too hard."

He smiled. He had, he noticed in her eyes, a pretty nice smile. "I'll be good."

"All right. You have a lot of clients who write science fiction, don't you?"

"Not a lot. Just the best," he said modestly.

She smiled again. Two curved dimples put her smile in parenthesis. He liked that. She said, "Let's say this is a science fiction plot. How to begin..."

"Once upon a time..." he prompted.

**S**HE LAUGHED like a child. "Once upon a time," she nodded, "there was a very advanced humanoid race in another galaxy. They had had wars—lots of them. They learned how to control them, but every once in a while things would get out of hand and another, and worse, war would happen. They developed weapon after weapon—things which make the H-bomb like a campfire in comparison. They had planet-smashers. They could explode a sun. They could do things we can only dimly understand. They could put a local warp in time itself, or unify the polarity in the gravito-magnetic field of an entire solar system."

"Does this gobbledegook come easy to you?" he asked.

"It does just now," she answered shyly. "Anyway, they developed the ultimate weapon—one which made all the others obsolete. It was enormously difficult to make, and only a few were manufactured. The secret of making it died out, and the available stocks were used at one time or another. The time to use them is coming again—and I don't mean on Earth. The little fuses we have are flea-hops. This is important business.

"Now, a cargo ship was travelling between galaxies on hyperspatial drive.

In a crazy, billion-to-one odds accident, it emerged into normal space smack in the middle of a planetoid. It wasn't a big one; the ship wasn't atomized—just wrecked. It was carrying one of these super-weapons. It took thousands of years to trace it, but it has been traced. The chances are strong that it came down on a planet. It's wanted.

"It gives out no detectible radiation. But in its shielded state, it has a peculiar effect on living tissues which come near it."

"Devils into saints?"

"The effect is...peculiar. Now..." She held up fingers. "If the nature of this object were known, and if it fell into the wrong hands, the effect here on Earth could be dreadful. There are megalomaniacs on earth so unbalanced that they would threaten even their own destruction unless their demands were met. Point two: If the weapon were used on Earth, not only would Earth as we know it cease to exist, but the weapon would be unavailable to those who need it importantly."

Cris sat staring at her, waiting for more. There was no more. Finally he licked his lips and said, "You're telling me that Sig Weiss has stumbled across this thing."

"I'm telling you a science fiction plot."

"Where did you get your...information?"

"It's a science fiction story."

He grinned suddenly, widely. "I'll be good," he said again. "What do you want me to do?"

Her eyes became very bright. "You aren't like most agents," she said.

"When I was in a British Colony, the English used to say to me, every once in a while, 'You aren't like most Americans.' I always found it slightly insulting. All right; what do you want me to do?"

She patted his hand. "See if you can make Weiss write another *Traveling Crag*. If he can, then find out exactly how and where he wrote it. And let me know."

They rose. He helped her with her light coat. He said, "Know something?" When she smiled up at him he said, "You don't strike me as Miss Average."

"Oh, but I was," she answered softly. "I was."

## TELEGRAM

SIG WEISS                      July 15  
TURNVILLE

PLEASE UNDERSTAND THAT WHAT FOLLOWS HAS NOTHING WHATEVER TO DO WITH YOUR GROSS LACK OF HOSPITALITY. I REALIZE THAT YOUR WAY OF LIFE ON YOUR OWN PROPERTY IS JUSTIFIED IN TERMS OF ME, AN INTRUDER. I AM FORGETTING THE EPISODE. I ASSUME YOU ALREADY HAVE. NOW TO BUSINESS: YOUR LAST MANUSCRIPT IS THE MOST UTTERLY INSULTING DOCUMENT I HAVE SEEN IN FOURTEEN PROFESSIONAL YEARS. TO INSULT ONE'S AGENT IS STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE: TO INSULT ONESELF IS INEXCUSABLE AND BROTHER YOU'VE DONE IT. SIT DOWN AND READ THE STORY THROUGH, IF YOU CAN, AND THEN REREAD THE TRAVELING CRAG. YOU WILL NOT NEED MY CRITICISM. MY ONLY SUGGESTION TO YOU IS TO DUPLICATE EXACTLY THE CIRCUMSTANCES UNDER

WHICH YOU WROTE YOUR FIRST STORY. UNLESS AND UNTIL YOU DO THIS WE NEED HAVE NO FURTHER CORRESPONDENCE. I ACCEPT YOUR SINCERE THANKS FOR NOT SUBMITTING YOUR SECOND STORY ANYWHERE.

CRISLEY POST

Naome whistled. "Really—a straight telegram? What about a night letter?"

Cris smiled at the place where the wall met the ceiling. "Straight rate."

"Yes, master." She wielded a busy pencil. "That's costing us \$13.75, sir," she said at length, "plus tax. Grand total, \$17.46. Cris, you have a hole in your head!"

"If you know of a better 'ole, go to it," he quoted dreamily. She glared at him, reached for the phone, and continued to glare as she put the telegram on the wire.

In the next two weeks Cris had lunch three times with Tillie Moroney, and dinner once. Naome asked for a raise. She got it, and was therefore frightened.

CRIS RETURNED from the third of these lunches (which was the day after the dinner) whistling. He found Naome in tears.

"Hey...what's happening here? You don't do that kind of thing, remember?"

He leaned over her desk. She buried her face in her arms and boo-hooed lustily. He knelt beside her and put an arm around her shoulders. "There," he said, patting the nape of her neck. "Take a deep breath and tell me about it."

She took a long, quavering breath, tried to speak, and burst into tears again. "F-f-fi-fi..."

"What?"

"F—" She swallowed with difficulty, then said, "*Fire of Heaven!*" and waived.

"What?" he yelled. "I thought you said '*Fire of Heaven.*'"

She blew her nose and nodded. "I did," she whispered. "H-here." She dumped a pile of manuscript in front of him and buried her face in her arms again. "L-leave me alone."

In complete bewilderment, he gathered up the typewritten sheets and took them to his desk.

There was a covering letter.

*Dear Mr. Post: There will never be a way for me to express my thanks to you, nor my apologies for the way I treated you when you visited me. I am willing to do anything in my power to make amends.*

*Knowing what I do of you, I think you would be most pleased by another story written the way I did the Crag. Here it is. I hope it measures up. If it doesn't, I earnestly welcome any suggestions you may have to fix it up.*

*I am looking forward very much indeed to meeting you again under better circumstances. My house is yours when you can find time to come out, and I do hope it will be soon. Sincerely, S. W.*

With feelings of awe well mixed with astonishment, Cris turned to the manuscript. *Fire of Heaven*, by Sig Weiss, it was headed. He began to read. For a moment, he was conscious of Naome's difficult and diminishing sniffs, and then he became completely immersed in the story.

Twenty minutes later, his eyes, blurred and smarting, encountered "The End." He propped his forehead on one palm and rummaged clumsily for his handkerchief. Having thoroughly mopped and blown, he looked

across at Naome. Her eyes were red-rimmed and still wet. "Yes?" she said.

"Oh my God yes," he answered.

They stared at each other for a breathless moment. Then she said in a soprano near-whisper: "*Fire of...*" and began to cry again.

"Cut it out," he said hoarsely.

When he could, he got up and opened the window. Naome came and stood beside him. "You don't read that," he said after a time. "It... happens to you."

She said, "What a tragedy. What a beautiful, beautiful tragedy."

"He said in his letter," Cris managed, "that if I had any suggestions to fix it up..."

"Fix it up," she said in shaken scorn. "There hasn't been anything like him since—"

"There hasn't been anything like him period." Cris snapped his fingers. "Get on your phone. Call the airlines. Two tickets to the nearest feeder-field to Turnville. Call the Drive-Ur-Self service. Have a car waiting at the field. I'm not asking any woman to climb that mountain on foot. Send this telegram to Weiss: Taking up your very kind offer immediately. Bringing a friend. Will wire arrival time. Profound thanks for the privilege of reading *Fire of Heaven*. From a case hardened ten percenter those words come hard and are well earned. Post."

"Two tickets," said Naome breathlessly. "Oh! Who's going to handle the office?"

HE THUMPED her shoulder. "You can do it, kid. You're wonderful. Indispensable. I love you. Get me Tillie Moroney's number, will you?"

She stood frozen, her lips parted, her nostrils slightly distended. He looked at her, looked again. He was aware that she had stopped breathing. "Naome!"

She came to life slowly and turned, not to him, but on him. "You're taking that—that Moron-y creature—"

"Moroney. What's the matter with you?"

"Oh Cris, how could you?"

"What have I done? What's wrong? Listen, this is business. I'm not romancing the girl! Why—"

She curled her lip. "Business! Then it's the first business that's gone on around here that I haven't known about."

"Oh, it isn't office business, Naome. Honestly."

"Then there's only one thing it could be!"

Cris threw up his hands. "Trust me this once. Say! Why should it eat you so much, even if it was monkey-business, which it isn't?"

"I can't bear to see you throw yourself away!"

"You—I didn't know you felt—"

"Shut up!" she roared. "Don't flatter yourself. It's just that she's... average. And so are you. And when you add an average to an average, you've produced NOTHING!"

He sat down at his desk with a thump and reached for the phone, very purposefully. But his mind was in such a tangle at the moment, that he didn't know what to do with the phone once it was in his hands, until Naome stormed over and furiously dropped a paper in front of him. It had Tillie's number on it. He grinned at her stupidly and sheepishly and dialled. By this time, Naome was speaking to the airlines office, but he knew perfectly well that she could talk and listen at the same time.

"Hello?" said the phone.

"Ull-ull," he said, watching Naome's back stiffen. He spun around in his swivel chair so he could talk facing the wall.

"Hello?" said the phone again.

"Tillie, Weiss found it he wrote

another story it's a dream he invited me down and I'm going and you're coming with me," he blurted.

"I beg your—Cris, is anything the matter? You sound so strange."

"Never mind that," he said. He repeated the news more coherently, acutely conscious of Naome's attention to every syllable. Tillie uttered a cry of joy and promised to be right over. He asked her to hang on and forced himself to get the plane departure from Naome. Pleading packing and business odds and ends, he asked her to meet him at the airport. She agreed, for which he was very thankful. The idea of her walking into the office just now was more than he could take.

NAOME had done her phoning and was in a flurry of effort involving her files, which had always been a mystery to Cris. She kept bringing things over to him. "Sign these." "You promised to drop Rogers a note about this." "What do you want done about Borilla's scripts?" Until he was snowed under. "Hold it! These things can wait!"

"No they can't," she said icily. "I wouldn't want them on my conscience. You see, this is my last day here."

"Your—Naome! You can't quit! You can't!"

"I can and I am and I do. Check this list."

"Naome, I—"

"I won't listen. My mind's made up."

"All right then. I'll manage. But it's a shame about *Fire of Heaven*. Such a beautiful job. And here it must sit until I get back. I did want you to market it."

"You'd trust me to market that story?" Her eyes were huge.

"No one else. There isn't anyone who knows the market better, or who would make a better deal. I trust you



with it absolutely. After you've done that one last big thing for me—go, then, if you'll be happier somewhere else."

"Crisley Post, I hate you and despise you. You're a fiend and a spider. Th-thank you. I'll never forget you for this. I'll type up four originals and sneak them around. Movies, of course. What a TV script! And radio...let's see; two, no—three British outfits can bid against each other...you're doing this on purpose to keep me from leaving!"

"Sure," he said jovially. "I'm real cute. I wrote the story myself just because I couldn't get anyone to replace you."

At last, she laughed. "There's one thing I'm damn sure you didn't do. An editor is a writer who can't write, and an agent is a writer who can't write as well as an editor."

He laughed with her. He bled too, but it was worth it, to see her laugh again.

THE PLANE trip was pleasant. It lasted a long time. The ship sat down every 45 minutes or so all the way across the country. Cris figured it was the best Naome could do on short notice. But it gave them lots of time to talk. And talking to Tillie was a pleasure. She was intelligent and articulate, and had read just as many of his favorite books as he had of hers. He told her enough about *Fire of Heaven* to intrigue her a lot and make her cry a little, without spoiling the plot for her. They found music to disagree about, and shared a view of a wonderful lake down through the clouds, and all in all it was a good trip. Occasionally, Cris glanced at her—most often when she was asleep—with a touch of surmise, like a little curl of smoke, thinking of Naome's suspicions about him and Tillie. He wasn't romancing Tillie. He wasn't.

Was he?

They landed at last, and again he blessed Naome; the Drive-Ur-Self car was at the airfield. They got a road map from a field attendant and drove off through the darkest morning hours. Again Cris found himself glancing at the relaxed girl beside him, half asleep in the cold glow of the dash lights. A phrase occurred to him: "undivided front like a Victorian"—Naome's remark. He flushed. It was true. An affectation of Tillie's, probably; but everything she wore was highnecked and full-cut.

The sky had turned from grey to pale pink when they pulled up at the Turnville store. Cris honked, and in due course the screen door slammed and the old proprietor ambled down the wooden steps and came to peer into his face.

"Heh! If 'taint that city feller. How're ya, son? Didn't know you folks ever got up and about this early."

"We're up late, dad. Got some gas for us?"

"Reckon there's a drop left."

Cris got out and went back with the old man to unlock the gas tank. "Seen Weiss recently?" he asked.

"Same as usual. Put through some big orders. Seen him do that before. Usually means he's holing up for five, six months. Though why he bought so much liquor an' drape material and that, I can't figure."

"How'd he behave?"

"Same as ever. Friendly as a wet wildcat with fleas."

CRIS THANKED him and paid him and they turned up the rocky hill road. As they reached the crest, they gasped together at the sun-flooded valley that lay before them. "Memories are the only thing you ever have that you always keep," said Tillie softly, "and this is one for both of us. I'm

...glad you're in it for me, Cris."

"I love you, too," he said in the current idiom, and found himself, hot-faced, looking into a face as suffused as his. They recoiled from each other and started to chatter about the weather—stopped and roared together with laughter. He took her hand and helped her up the cutbank. They paused at the top. "Listen," he said in a low voice. "That old character in the store has seen Weiss recently. And he says there's no change. I think we'd better be just a little careful."

He looked at her and again caught that listening expression. "No," she said at length, "it's all right. The store's outside the...the influence he's under. He's bound to revert when it's gone. But he'll be all right now. You'll see."

"Will you tell me how you know these things?" he demanded, almost angry.

"Of course," she smiled. Then the smile vanished. "But not now."

"That's more than I've gotten so far," he grumbled. "Well, let's get to it."

Hand in hand, they went up the path. The house seemed the same, and yet...there was a difference, an intensification. The leaves were greener, the early sun warmer.

There were three grey kittens on the porch.

"Ahoy the house!" Cris called self-consciously.

The door opened, and Weiss stood there, peering. He looked for a moment exactly as he had when he watched Cris stride off on the earlier visit. Then he moved out into the sun. He scooped up one of the kittens and came swiftly to meet them. "Mr. Post! I got your wire. How very good of you to come."

He was dressed in a soft sport shirt and grey slacks—a startling difference from his grizzled boots-and-

khaki appearance before. The kitten snuggled into the crook of his elbow, made a wild grab at his pocket-button, caught its tail instead. He put it down, and it fawned and purred and rubbed against his shoe.

Weiss straightened up and smiled at Tillie. "Hello."

"Tillie, this is Sig Weiss. Miss Moroney."

"Tillie," she said, and gave him her hand.

"Welcome home," Weiss said. He turned to Cris. "This is your home, for as long as you want it, whenever you can come."

CRIS STOOD slack-jawed. "I ought to be more tactful," he said at length, "but I just can't believe it. I should have more sense than to mention my last visit, but this—this—"

Weiss put a hand on his shoulder. "I'm glad you mentioned it. I've been thinking about it, too. Hell—if you'd forgotten all about it, how could you appreciate all this? Come on in. I have some surprises for you."

Tillie held Cris back a moment. "It's here," she whispered. "Here in the house!"

The weapon—here? Somehow, he had visualized it as huge—a great horned mine or a tremendous torpedo shape. He glanced around apprehensively. The ultimate weapon—invented after the planet-smasher, the sun-burster—what incredible thing could it be?

Weiss stood by the door. Tillie stepped through, then Cris.

The straight drapes, the solid sheet of plate glass that replaced the huge sashed window; the heavy skins that softened the wide-planked floor, the gleaming andirons and the copper pots on the fieldstone wall; the record-player and racks of albums—all the other soothing, comforting finishes

of the once-bleak room—all these Cris noticed later. His big surprise was not quite a hundred pounds, not quite five feet tall—

"Cris..."

"Naome's here," he said inanely, and sat down to goggle at her.

Weiss laughed richly. "Why do you suppose you and Tillie got that pogo-plane cross country, stopping at every ball-park and cornfield? Naome got a non-stop flight to within fifty miles of here, and air-taxi to the bottom of the mountain, and came up by cab."

"I had to," said Naome. "I had to see what you were getting into. You're so—impetuous." She came smiling to Tillie. "I am glad to see you."

"Why, you idiot!" said Cris to Naome. "What could you have done if he—if—"

"I'm prettier than you are, darling," laughed Naome.

"She came pussyfooting up to the house like a kid playing Indian," said Weiss. "I circled through the woods and pussyfooted right along with her. When she was peeping into the side window, I reached out and put a hand on her shoulder."

"You might have scared her into a conniption!"

"Not here," said Weiss gravely.

Surprisingly, Tillie nodded. "You can't be afraid here, Cris. You're saying all those things about what might have happened, but they're not frightening to think about now, are they?"

"No," Cris said thoughtfully. "No." He gazed around him. "This is—crazy. Everybody should be this crazy."

"It would help," said Weiss. "How do you like the place now, Cris?"

"It's—it's grand," said Cris. Naome laughed. She said, "Listen to the vocabulary kid there. 'Grand.' You meant 'Peachy', didn't you?"

CRIS DIDN'T laugh with the others. "Fear," he said. "You can't eliminate fear. Fear is a survival emotion. If you didn't know fear, you'd fall out of windows, cut yourself on rocks, get hunted and killed by mountain lions."

"If I open the window," Weiss asked, "would you be afraid to jump out? Come over here and look."

Cris stepped to the great window. He had not known that the house was built so close to the edge. Crag on crag, fold after billow, the land fell down and away to the distant throat of the valley. Cris stepped back respectfully. "Open it if you like," he said, and swallowed, "and somebody else can jump. Not me, kiddies."

Sig Weiss smiled. "Q.E.D. Survival fear is still with us. What we've lost here is fear of anything that is not so. When you came here before, you saw a very frightened man. Most of my fears were 'might-be' fears. I was afraid people might attack me, so I attacked first. I was afraid of seeming different from people, so I stayed where my imagined difference would not show. I was afraid of being the same as people, so I tried to be different."

"What does it?" Cris asked.

"What makes us all what we are now? Something I found. I won't tell you what it is or where it is. I call it an amulet, a true magic amulet, knowing that it's no more or less magic than flame springing to the end of a wooden stick." He took a kitchen match from his pocket and ran his thumbnail across it. It flared up, and he flipped it into the fireplace. "I won't tell you where or what it is because, although I've lost my fear, I haven't lost my stubbornness. I've lived miserably, a partial, hunted, hunting existence, and now I'm alive. And I mean to stay this way."

"Where did you find it?" Tillie asked. "Mind telling us that?"

"Not at all. A half mile down the mountain there was a tremendous rockfall a couple of years ago. No one owns that land; no one noticed. I climbed down there once looking for hawks' eggs. I found a place...

"**H**OW CAN I tell you what that place was like, or what it was like to find it? It was a brush-grown, rocky hillside near the gaping scar of the slide, where the crust of years had sloughed away. Maybe the mountain moved its shoulder in its sleep. There were flowers—ordinary wildflowers—but perfect, vivid, vital. They lived long and hardily, and they were beautiful. The bushes had an extraordinary green and a fine healthy gloss, and it was a place where the birds came close to me as I sat and watched them. It was the birds who taught me that fear never walked in that place.

"How can I tell you—what can I say about the meaning of that place to me? I'd been a psychic cripple all my life, hobbling through the rough country of my own ideas, spending myself in battle against ghosts I had invented to justify my fears, for fear was there first. And when I found that place, my inner self threw away its crutches. More than that—it could fly!

"How can I tell you what it meant to me to leave that place? To walk away from it was to buckle on the braces, pick up the crutches again, to feel my new wings moult and fall away.

"I went there more and more. Once I took my typewriter and worked there, and that was *The Traveling Crag*. Cris never knew how offended I was, how invaded, to find that he had divined the existence of that place through the story. That was why I

turned out that other abortion, out of stubbornness—a desire to prove to Cris and to myself that my writing came from me and not from the magic of that place. I know better now. I don't know what another writer would do here. Better than anything he could conceivably do anywhere else. But it wouldn't be the *Crag* or *Fire*, because they could only have been mine."

Cris asked, "Would you let another writer work here?"

"I'd love it! Do you mean to ask if I want to monopolize this place, and the wonders it works? Of course not. One or another fear or combinations of fear are at the base of any monopoly, whether it's in industry, or in politics, or in the area of religious thought. And there's no fear here."

"There should be some sort of a—a shrine here," murmured Naome.

"There is. There will be, as long as I can keep the amulet. I found it, you see. It was lying right out in the sun. I took it and brought it here. The birds wouldn't forgive me for a while, but I've made them happy here since. And here it is and here it will stay, and there's your shrine."

**F**EAR WALKED in then. It closed gently on Cris's heart, and he turned to look at Tillie. Her eyes were closed. She was listening.

A hell of an agent I turned out to be, he thought. How much I was willing to do for Weiss, how much for all the world through his work! By himself he found himself, the greatest of human achievements. And I have done the one thing that will take that away from him and from us all, leaving only the dwindling memory of this life without fear—and two great short stories.

He looked at Tillie again. His gaze caught hers, and she rose. Her features were rigidly controlled, but through his mounting fear Cris could

recognize the thing she was fighting. She surely understood what was about to happen to Weiss and to the world if she succeeded. Her understanding versus her . . . orders, was it?

Cris had sat in that incredible aura, listening to the joyous expression of Sig Weiss's delivery from fear, and he had thought of killing. Now, he realized that part of her already thought as he did, and perhaps . . . perhaps . . .

"Sig, can we look around outside?" Cris had stepped over to Tillie almost before he knew he wanted to.

"You own the place," said Weiss cheerfully. "Naome and I'll stir up some food: You've had a nice leisurely trip. I wonder if you realize that Naome spent fourteen hours on a typewriter before she took that long hop? *Fire of Heaven's* well launched now, thanks to her. Anyway, she deserves food."

"And a golden crown, which I shall include in the next pay envelope. Thank you, Naome. You're out of your mind."

"Thank you," she twinkled.

Cris led Tillie out, and they walked rapidly away from the house. "Not too far," she cautioned. "Let's stay where we can think. We're in a magic circle, you know, and outside we'll be afraid of each other, and of ourselves and of all our ghosts."

He asked her, "What are you going to do?"

**"I** SHOULDN'T have got you into this. I should have come by myself."

"I'd have stopped you then. Don't you see? Sig would have told me. Even with whatever help you have, you couldn't have succeeded in getting the weapon on the first try. He's too alert, too alive, far too jealous of what the 'amulet' has given him. He'd have told me, and I'd have stopped you, to save him and his

work. You made me an ally, and that prevented me."

"Cris, Cris, I didn't think that out!"

"I know you didn't. It was done for you. Who is it, Tillie? Who?"

"A ship," she whispered. "A space ship."

"You've seen it?"

"Oh, yes."

"Where is it?"

"Here."

"Here, in Turnville?"

She nodded.

"And it—they—communicate with you?"

"Yes."

He asked her again. "What are you going to do?"

"If I tell you I'll get the weapon, you'll kill me to save Weiss, and his work, and his birds, and his shrine, and all they can mean to the world. Won't you, Cris?"

"I will certainly try."

"And if I refuse to get it for them—"

"Would they kill you?"

"They could."

"If they did, could they then get the weapon?"

"I don't know. I don't think so. They've never forced me, Cris, never. They've always appealed to my reason. I think if they could control me or anyone else, they'd have done it. They'd have to find another human ally, and start the persuading process all over again. By which time Weiss and everyone else would be warned, and it would be much more difficult for them."

"Nothing's difficult for them," he said suddenly. "They can smash planets."

"Cris, we don't think as well as they do, but we don't think the way they do, either. And from what I can get, I'm sure that they're good—that they will do anything they can to

spare this planet and the life on it. That seems to be one of the big reasons for their wanting to get that weapon away from here."

"And what of their other aims, then? Can we take all this away from humanity in favor of some cosmic civilization that we don't know and have never seen, which regards us as a dust-fleck in a minor galaxy? Let's face it, Tillie: they'll get it sooner or later. They're strong enough. But let's keep it while we can. A minute, a day of this aura is a minute or a day in which a human being can know what it's like to live without fear. Look at what it's done for Weiss; think what it can do for others. What are you going to do?"

"I— Kiss me, Cris."

**HIS LIPS** had just touched hers when there was a small giggle behind them. Cris whirled.

"Bless you, my children."

"Naome!"

"I didn't mean to bust anything up. I mean that." She skipped up to them. "You can go right back to it after I've finished interrupting. But I've just got to tell you. You know the fright Sig tried to throw into me when I got here last night? I'm getting even. I found his amulet. I really did. It was stuck to the underside of a shelf in the linen closet. You'd have to be my size to see it. I swiped it."

Tillie's breath hissed in: "Where is it? What did you do with it?"

"Oh, don't worry, it's safe enough. I hid it good, this time. Now we'll make him wonder where it is."

"Where is it?" asked Cris.

"Promise not to tell him?"

"Of course."

"Well, it's smack in the innards of one of his pet new possessions. You haven't been in the west room—the hell he calls a library—have you?"

They shook their heads.

"Well, he's got himself a great big radio. I lifted the lid, see, and down inside among the tubes and condensers and all that macaroni are some wire hoops, sort of. This amulet, it's a tiny thing—maybe four inches long and as wide as my two thumbs. It's sort of—blurry around the edges. Anyway, I stuck it inside one set of those hoops. Cris—you're green! What's the matter?"

"Tillie—the coil—the RF coil! If he turns that set on—"

"Oh, dear God..." Tillie breathed.

"What's the matter with you two? I didn't do anything wrong, did I?"

They raced into the house, through the living room. "In here!" bellowed Cris. They pounded to the west room, getting into each other's way as they went in.

Sig Weiss was there, smiling. "Just in time. I want to show you the best damn transceiver in—"

"Don't! Don't touch it—"

"Oh, a little hamming won't hurt," said Sig.

He threw the switch.

**THERE WAS** a loud click and a shower of dust.

And silence.

Naome came all the way in, went like a sleepwalker to the radio and opened the lid. There was a hole in the grey crinkle-finished steel, roughly rectangular. Weiss looked at it curiously, touched it, looked up. There was a similar hole in the ceiling. He bent over the chassis. "Now how do you like that! A coil torn all to hell. Something came down through the roof—see?—and smashed right through my new transmitter."

"It didn't go down," said Cris hoarsely. "It went up."

Naome began to cry.

"What the hell's the matter with you people?" Sig demanded.

Cris suddenly clutched Tillie's arm.

"The ship! The space ship! They wouldn't let it go off while they're here!"

"They did," said Tillie in a flat voice.

"Will somebody please tell me what gives here?" asked Sig plaintively.

Through a thick silence, Tillie said, "I'll tell it." She sank down on her knees, slowly sat on the rug. "Cris knows most of this," she said. "Don't stop to wonder if it's all true. It is." She told about the races, the wars, the weapons of greater and greater destructiveness and, finally, the ultimate weapon, and its strange effect on living tissue. "Eight months ago, the ship contacted me. There was a connection made with my nerve-endings. I don't understand it. It wasn't telepathy; they were artificial neural currents. They talked to me. They've been talking ever since."

"My amulet!" Sig suddenly cried.

"Sit down," said Tillie flatly. He sat.

Cris said, "I thought you required some physical contact for them to communicate with you. But I've been with you while you were communicating, and you had no contact."

"I hadn't?" She began to unbutton her blouse at the throat. She stopped with the fourth button, and gently drew out a metal object shaped somewhat like a bulbous spearhead with a blunt point. It glittered strangely with a color not quite that of gold and not quite of polished brass. It seemed to be glazed with a thin layer of clear crystal.

"Oh-h-h," breathed Naome, in a revelatory tone.

Tillie smiled suddenly at her. "You minx. You always wondered why I never wore a V-neck. Come here, all of you. Down on the rug."

**M**YSTIFIED, THEY gathered around. "Put your hands on it."

They did so, and stared at each other and at their hands, waiting like old maids over a Ouija board. "It hurts a tiny bit at first as the probes go in, but it passes quickly. Be very still."

A strange, not unpleasant prickling sensation came and went. There was a slight shock, another; more prickling.

*Testing. Testing. Naome Cris Sig Tillie...*

"Everybody get that?" asked Tillie calmly.

Naome squeaked. "It's like someone talking inside my sinuses!"

"It said our names," said Sig tautly. Cris nodded, fascinated.

The silent voice spoke: *Sig, your amulet is gone and you have lost nothing.*

*Tillie, you have been faithful to your own.*

*Naome, you have been used, and you have done no wrong.*

*Cris, we have observed that it takes superhuman understanding to guide and direct work you cannot do yourself.*

*Reorient your thinking, all of you. You insist that what is lethal or cosmically important must be huge. You insist that anything which transcends a horror must be greater horror.*

*The amulet was indeed the ultimate weapon. Its effect is not to destroy, but to stop useless conflict. At this moment there is a chain reaction occurring throughout this planet's atmosphere affecting only one rare isotope of nitrogen. In times to come, your people will understand its radiochemistry; it is enough for you now to know that its most significant effect is to turn on the full analytical powers of the mind whenever fear is experienced. Panic occurs when analysis is shut off. Embarrassment occurs when fear is not analyzed. Hereafter, no truck-driver will fear to use the*



word 'exquisite', no propagandist will create the semblance of truth by repeating falsehoods, no human group will be able to instill fears about any other human group which are not common to the respective individuals of the groups. There will be no fear-ridden movements of securities, and no lovers will be with each other and afraid to state their love. In large issues and in small ones, the greater the emergency the greater will be the stimulation of the analytical powers.

That is the meaning and purpose and constitution of the ultimate weapon. To you it is a gift. There are few races in cosmic history with a higher potential than yours, or with a more miserable expression of it. The gift is yours because of this phenomenon.

As for us, our quest is as stated to you. We were to seek out the weapon and bring it back with us. We gave it to you instead, by manipulation of your impulses, Naome, and yours, Sig, with the radio. Earth needs it more than we do.

But we have not failed. The radio-chemistry of the nitrogen-isotope reaction and its catalyses are now widely available to us. It will be simplicity itself for us to recreate the weapon, and the time it will take us is as nothing..

...For we are a race which commands the fluxes of time, and we can

braid a distance about our fingers, and hold Alpha and Omega together in the palms of our hands.

"THE PROBES are gone," said Tillie, after a long silence.

Reluctantly, they removed their hands from the communicator, and flexed them.

Cris said, "Tillie, where is the ship?"

She smiled. "Remember? 'You insist that what is cosmically important must be huge.'" She pointed. "That is the ship."

They stared at the bulbous arrow-head. It rose and drifted toward the door. It paused there, tilted toward them in an obvious salute, and then, like a light extinguished, it was gone.

Naome sprang to her feet. "Is it all true, about the propaganda, the panic, the—the lovers who can speak their minds?"

"All true," smiled Tillie.

Naome said, "Testing. Testing. Sig Weiss, I love you."

Sig picked her up and hugged her. "Come on, all of you. I want to walk clear down to the corners and have a beer with the old man. I want to tell him something I've never said before—that he's my neighbor."

Cris helped Tillie up. "I think he stocks some real V-type halters."

Outside, it was a greener world, and all over it the birds sang.

## THE END

COMING in the August AMAZING STORIES

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# READER'S PAGE

## STAY AS SWEET AS YOU ARE!

Dear Editor:

Thank God for the Ziff-Davis Publishing Co! Having startled you with this outburst, please allow me to explain the reasons for it, before some of your suspicious readers jump to the conclusion that I am an exuberant shareholder in Ziff-Davis and have just received a fat check.

I am a collector and a keen reader of science-fiction, fantasy and weird stories. I demand more from a magazine than merely good stories and an intelligent editorial policy. I want a magazine which I will want to collect and strive to complete my files of, and a magazine which I can be proud to show to my non-fantasy friends, and perhaps help to convert them to fandom.

Now, I had never given much thought to the size of the Ziff-Davis publications, until this flood of new fantasy magazines began to appear. To my horror, I discovered that almost every new s-f and fantasy magazine was in pocketbook or digest size. I cannot conceive of anything more prosaic or unexciting. The impressive bulk of the Ziff-Davis mags is now becoming more apparent when I contrast them to these lousy digest-sized magazines.

So please, please, don't ever go digest-sized; don't alter the size of either AS or FA, unless it be to make them bigger. 8x11 would be even better than your present size. In fact, I will go so far as to say that if you ever start shrinking the size of either, I shall immediately cancel my subscriptions.

How about an Annual, a la your famous 1927 Annual? And what about a companion magazine restricted to weird tales only? One of your lady readers made this suggestion some time ago, and I am all for it.

Keep up the good work with both FA and AS.

Roger Dard  
232 James Street  
Perth  
Western Australia

*A change in the format of our magazines has taken place. But somehow, it seems to us that size, covers, edges trimmed or untrimmed, typography, illustrations—all these are only the trimmings to the real structure; The stories themselves. We*

*have no present plans for either an Annual or a magazine devoted entirely to stories of a weird type.* —Ed.

## BETTER THAN TELEPHONE BOOKS!

Dear Editor:

Last July I was at a vacation resort, and on a rainy day I was looking for reading material. Besides a dozen 1929 telephone books I saw a copy of AMAZING STORIES. I picked it up and began reading "You Can't Escape From Mars." I enjoyed it. I read all but two stories in the issue.

In September I bought the Nov. AMAZING and the Oct. FANTASTIC ADVENTURES. In AS the stories were good but as always J. Allen St. John's illustration was very good. In FA, though, I enjoyed L. Ron Hubbard's "The Masters of Sleep" so much that I went and bought "Slaves of Sleep" the next day. In the Nov. FA I enjoyed "Mistress of the Djinn" by Geoff St. Reynard so much that I've already approved "The Curse of Ra" without its being published. In the Dec. AS, "Vengeance of the Golden God" was all right but "Divided We Fall" was the star of the issue. "When the World Tottered," in the Dec. FA was very good but still not as good as "Masters of Sleep" or "Mistress of the Djinn." St. John's illustrations were again excellent.

Now for the January issues. FA was a disappointment. AS had a good cover and Sharp's illo for "Empire of Evil" was good. The cover story, "Empire of Evil," "The Devil You Say," and "Secret of the Death Dome" were all good.

Alexander Fundukis  
629 West 135th Street  
New York, 31, N. Y.

*Like the man says, we aim to please. There are some top quality stories coming up in both AMAZING STORIES and FANTASTIC ADVENTURES—stories so good that no true science-fiction fan can afford to miss them!* —Ed.

## NOTE FOR GERTRUDE

Dear Editor:

The book inquired for by Miss Gertrude Whittum (FA, April '51, p. 122) is OUT OF THE SILENCE by the Australian writer Erle Cox, published in London by J. Hamilton in 1927 and

again in Melbourne by Robertson & Mullens in 1947. It's one of the best of the approximately 50 lost-continent novels published in book form.

L. Sprague de Camp  
Wallingford, Pennsylvania

Thanks, Mr. De Camp. —Ed.

# WHAT'S SAUCE FOR THE GOOSE...

Dear Editor:

In the April, 1951 issue of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES, Laura Hills' letter about the unseen intruder's noisy walk through her house was a most interesting one. Where did the visitor come from? One who couldn't have been too alien as the cat remained calm in its presence. If a non-terrestrial, was the trip to Earth made in a flying saucer? Who can say? Anyone's guess would be as good as mine. Now, a word or two regarding the disks.

Because of the glamour Mars has always held for us Earth folk, the public seems to have accepted the idea that the flying saucers come from that planet as though it were a proven fact. This should not be taken for granted, for it is mere speculation. Nothing more. Their origin could as easily be from outside our Solar System as within.

Now, a rather unique claim as to their true home has been advanced in a booklet—"The Ether Ship Mystery and Its Solution"—by Meade Layne.

Here the flying saucers are said to come from Etheria, the region of existence called the Etheric Plane or Etheric Level. Etherians who operate the wondrous disks are in the main indifferent toward us, unless we attack, pursue, annoy or cause them unease by our A- and H-bombs. Release of atomic energies is likely felt on the Etheric Levels with some discomfiture.

Where, one might ask, is Etheria, the source of the much discussed disks? Is it our nearest neighboring planets, Mars or Venus? Mr. Layne answers in the negative, that the disks, in fact, do not come from any of Sol's ring of nine planets, nor from any other heavenly body known to us. What is meant by "planet" is the visible astronomical body only.

Where then is Etheria? It is invisible, unheard and untouchable—and is in and around all visible objects.

To simplify Etheria as best we can, no one will deny that we are surrounded by colors and sounds unseen and unheard by our senses. That being the case, why can there not be a world, possessing sounds and colors, still imperceptible to us? A solid object with an undetectable color would remain invisible to our eyes.

The booklet contains much more on the subject. I would sincerely urge all those interested to secure a copy. The price is \$2.00. Address: Meade Layne, 3524 Adams Avenue, San Diego 16, California.

Yes, Laura Hills' letter was much enjoyed. How about printing more such "off-trail" ones in the Reader's Page?

Alex Saunders  
34 Hillsdale Avenue, W.,  
Toronto 12, Ontario,  
Canada

# ...IS POISON FOR THE GANDER

Dear Editor:

I am a nurse myself—have been for the past twelve years—and although I have read and enjoyed science-fiction and fantasy magazines for years, and have contemplated more than once writing to say so, it took that ridiculous and obviously "crack-pot" letter (April R. P.) from Laura Hills to actually bring me to the point of doing something concrete about it!

Why do you print such letters? The Reader's Page is short enough as it is, without wasting valuable space on letters which can only have an adverse reaction on the minds of certain impressionable people.

For a nurse to make the kind of statement made by Mrs. Hills is inexcusable! Her entire letter was so incoherent as to suggest either a disordered imagination or a deliberate attempt to amuse herself at the expense of the reader's intelligence.

I am not denying the reality of occurrences such as Mrs. Hills describes. Nor am I disputing such phenomena as ESP or the sudden appearance before one of a loved one who has just passed away at some great distance. Such things do occur too often to dismiss them lightly. What I do take exception to, however, is the general tone of the letter to which I refer.

Please forgive my sounding off this way, but I was so annoyed that I haven't even finished the Reader's Page to which I always turn first. I just had to get this off my chest!

Keep up the good work you've been doing and, please, won't you reprint some time or other what, to me at least, is one of the greatest fantasies of all time—the immortal "She".

Kaethe Clarusey  
72 East 98rd St.  
New York City 28, N.Y.

H. Rider Haggert's "She" was in our mind, too, one of the greatest fantasies of all time. Because it's been so widely read, it wouldn't be a good bet for reprint purposes. Anyway, only original material is used in FA. —Ed.

# HE WANTS A LONGER NOTEBOOK

Dear Editor:

I don't know why I haven't written you before—unless because repetition is boring. You always put out a good magazine. Maybe I'm spurred by the desire to

emphatically second J. Hintz' motion that we have a weird story once in a while. Speaking of classification, I'm not sure of the division line separating science-fiction and fantasy. Could you define please?

I'm sure, being human, that editors share with readers times when it is difficult to say WHAT they want in a story but given such a story they recognize it immediately. In the April issue, a particularly outstanding one, I liked the handling of "I. What Dark Mind" by Rog Phillips. Phillips can always be counted on for a good job, but sometimes he's better. This illustrates one of those times. "Some Do It With A Look" isn't to be dismissed lightly either.

I'm not going to evaluate each story. Always there is the factor of purely personal reaction. I don't care for a listing of each story in letters for the same reason though I do like comment on a story or so.

I am completely aware of why your covers are what they are. I don't like 'em, but new readers are coming along and need to be enticed. I can't imagine any fantastic fanatic not hunting FANTASTIC ADVENTURES even if the cover was missing. We know there's going to be at least a couple of real good stories.

Short stories please me more than novellies and thanks to all the gods of the galaxies you don't run serials. Serials are like those traveling dinners—salad at Mary's, main course at Susie's, dessert at Jane's. You've had everything but satisfaction. There's still no feeling of a well-balanced meal.

You're doing all right, Editor, which means I'M doing all right with FA! I could wish that you would give yourself a few more inches in the Editors Notebook.

Alice Bullock  
812 Gildersleeve  
Santa Fe, New Mexico

*Science-fiction is based on man's mechanical and imaginative progress. Fantasy has to do with the inexplicable, with the weird, with worlds outside "reality", and with "things that go bump in the night."*

## WHO WANTS TO WRITE A LETTER?

Dear Editor:

I just wanted to tell you that so far your mags have satisfied me almost completely. I like short stories and long novels and especially the articles.

I read the respective letters and enjoy them immensely, but none of them moved me nearly as much as it seems to move (jet propel?) them—some folks.

Once upon a time, I sent you a letter when I was mad at something or other—I've forgotten what—and it came back; therefore, I'm writing this letter in a

completely detached manner so I hope it will be published.

Reading a letter an irate person wrote in, I wonder why they get so angry. I read them griping about this and about that and about something else, and envy or pity them for it.

Would you please help me: I keep hearing about a story called "The Giants of Mogo" and I wonder if someone could tell me the plot for this story? It seems that I have forgotten it. I couldn't have missed the issue because I have got every issue you've put out since I got interested in s-f when I was a little boy (I'm fifteen now) and some way before that.

Could some people—guys or gals—about my age correspond with me? I promise solemnly to answer each letter I get.

I don't want to vote on any letters, because they were all good.

Dennis Doherty  
R. D. No. 5  
Mercer, Pennsylvania

*"The Giants of Mogo" by Don Wilcox appeared in the November 1947 issue of AMAZING STORIES. Do any of you readers have an extra copy you can send to Dennis?* —Ed.

## OUR MISTAKE

Dear Editor:

Please note: FANTASTIC ADVENTURES, March 1951, page 56—"Let's Do It Again." "The sun was warm...etc."

Page 68—"Jean watched the Plymouth tear out of the driveway, then she picked up the magazine. It was the March 1951 issue of AMAZING STORIES. She opened to the story called 'Let's Do It Again' and began to read: 'The sun was warm...etc.'"

How amazing! FANTASTIC ADVENTURES turned into AMAZING STORIES without any provocation on their part.

D. Friedland  
338 Knickerbocker Avenue  
Brooklyn 27, N. Y.

Dear Editor:

The March issue of FA was GUR-ATE. "Secret of the Flaming Ring". Wonderful. P. F. Costello is one of the greatest in his field.

"Death Has Green Eyes"—Jakes. He's good.

"Let's Do It Again". Look at the next to the last paragraph. Is this AS or FA?

"Pink Wind". Good—so was the illo.

"Social Obligation"—Good, but ending was stinko.

"The Master Ego"—O.K. Since when has Finlay gone stale?

Miz Vigil's got an ideal Print the names of the goons who don't get their letters published.

WEIRD TALES is good enough. Don't you start in with a weirdie. Look at STRANGE STORIES.

Ganley's letter gets my vote. I'm a teen-ager myself.

Eldon K. Everett  
P.O. Box 513  
Tacoma, Wash.

Yep, you've caught us in a redhanded error. In "Let's Do It Again", we meant to say FANTASTIC ADVENTURES, not AMAZING STORIES. —Ed.

# WE CAN TOO TAKE A DARE

Dear Editor:

FANTASTIC ADVENTURES, I dare you to print this. William Karney is wrong, as any machinist would know there is nothing in this world more sweet than a machine or engine properly functioning as intended by its designer or builder. Shape or form does not matter, just so it does what you want it to and it will if you are a machinist and not just a theoretician. Design does not make a machine operate, but the heart of every machine designer is in his brain child and will do more for it than for any other man.

This is the first time I have found it necessary to comment on anything in a science-fiction magazine in 20 years.

A. Fenstermacher  
804 N. 24th Street  
Philadelphia, Pa.

Mr. Fenstermacher refers to the fact article "Beauty and the Machine" by William Karney in the April 1951 FANTASTIC ADVENTURES —Ed.

# WHY NOT A SCIENCE LOBBY?

Dear Sir:

The feature "Packet-X200" by June Lurie in the April issue of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES refers to "a new development in aircraft transportation." This idea, while it probably has never been attempted before, is by no means new. I saw a complete set of plans, developed even farther, as long as ten years ago. The plans were scrapped because the man who dreamed it up thought it was useless commercially. Which brings me to the point of this letter.

All editors, writers, and readers of science-fiction are aware of the fact that the world of science-fiction has been successful in predicting inventions and developments in science technology years before they actually come to pass. Yet, would some interested group of men be organized to exploit ideas from their incubation, our technological world could advance much more rapidly.

Editors, writers, and readers of science-fiction come from every walk of life. They range from laborers to college pro-

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fessors. It is time their ideas were pooled for their personal as well as our national benefit.

And the editors and publishers of science-fiction are probably the only ones in a position to bring this about. We have labor, political, and industrial lobbies in Washington. Why not a science lobby? Why shouldn't our War and Defense departments benefit by a national suggestion box much as those currently employed by major industrial plants?

Think of the many thousands of varied ideas that die aborning yearly because their authors think them of little value or have not the energy nor the means to pursue them to their fruitful development.

Don't you think it is time that science-fiction graduated and went out into the world to make its own way?

A. Lewis Herzberg  
63-61 99th Street  
Rego Park, N. Y.

## PANACEA --- OR PHONEY?

By June Lurie

**T**HE MIRACLE drugs have given medicine a terrific weapon against disease—some people would say they are one of the most important developments of the twentieth century. But the average person, seeking a panacea and cure-all, is tending to attribute powers to the drugs which they do not possess. The most interesting example of this is the present argument about the effectiveness of the famous anti-histamines which purport to be specifics against that great enemy, the common cold.

Some popularizers of science have jumped on the bandwagon, claiming that the anti-histamines are almost completely effective in knocking out whatever virus causes the cold. Equally impressive sources discount this completely, claiming the anti-histamines are not effective at all. Just what is the truth?

University surveys conducted by objective scientists have shown that the anti-histamines do not cure the common cold. Cold cures simply have not yet been invented. These statements of fact will not be received with any great amount of belief by many people who will have thor-

oughly convinced themselves that the anti-histamines are "it"! All of which points out the driving desire of people to find a panacea for their ills. This is one of the outstanding characteristics of our scientific civilization.

Patent medicines have been substituted by popular demand for the old belief in magic and witchcraft. Proud of their knowledge of and belief in modern science, people will buy a new drug the minute it is announced, use it and be convinced that it is effective even though the most objective research discloses the opposite—so strong is the wish-fulfillment idea! Then after a time, when the hubbub has died down and some rationality has been restored, the campaign will die a quiet death and be forgotten. But the minute another specific is announced, the same users will take it up, profiting not at all by their experience.

This doesn't bode too well for the future. We can only hope that people will come to realize that responsible figures are interested in getting at the truth and that all the quackery of pseudo-science can't wash out one line of it!

## WANT TO RACE?

By

Frederic

Booth

**T**HE WORLD'S fastest racing car, the Railton Mobil Special, can travel at a speed of 403 miles per hour. This is one mile in ten seconds, which is about half the speed of sound. There are very few planes today—with the exception of the jets—that can tie this speed. And certainly none of the cars built today have even remotely attained it.

With an over-all width of eight feet, and 28' 8" in length, the Railton Mobil Special has two 12-cylinder Napier engines which can develop 2,600 horsepower. They occupy practically the entire

car. There is only room enough in the front for a small driver's seat. The driver of the racer gets into the seat through a door at the top. Until the auto is rolling along at 140 miles per hour, he doesn't shift from first to second gear. When it reaches 250 miles per hour, he casually shifts from second to high. Seems simple enough to go fast, but its driver once remarked that the only way to keep this car at 60 miles per hour was to throw it into first gear, then shift to neutral. Hardly something to get caught in a traffic jam with!

# SPOOR FROM SPACE!

By A. T. Kedzie

OUTSIDE of the intangible radiations which are constantly bombarding Earth, so far as we know, no physical object from outer space has landed on this planet except for meteorites. Notice, we say "so far as we know..." Maybe some spaceship has made the trip but at least we're unaware of it. However, meteorites land in plenty—they are constantly with us.

Recently an organizational effort has been made by astronomers to learn more about this one real source of information from space. Some very definite facts are known. The majority of meteorites are minute, little more than particles of dust and they are vaporized in the course of their passage through our upper atmosphere leaving no trace of their arrival. But there are still thousands which are large enough to have only their outer shell vaporized, and these plunge Earthward, for the most part landing in barren areas.

Even the majority of those meteorites which get through are rather small and make little or no trace, appearing briefly in the sky as "shooting stars" and then vanishing Earthwards to become a common stone recognized by only a few, familiar with their nature.

That leaves a very small number of meteorites which make an actual impression on old Mother Earth's hide. And as we know from examining their "spoor"—the holes left in the ground—these meteorites have ranged in size from objects the size of a baseball to some very few weighing hundreds or perhaps thousands of tons. A study of meteorite craters like the famous one in New Mexico or a series of huge ones in Siberia has disclosed some interesting information. For one thing, the meteorite does not appear to bury itself deep within the Earth as had formerly been supposed. Rather, its kinetic energy of motion is so high that it literally explodes when it strikes, scattering the majority of its substance over a vast area. ii) Thus, the traces left are somewhat indirect and tenuous and the meteor's nature must really be disclosed by back-tracking along its probable path.

Most meteorites exhibit one of two basic natures. They are either primarily stone or a mixture of stone and nickel iron and it is known that some primitive peoples learned to work meteoric metals into weapons and tools. Meteors are, thus, as concrete and real an example of the fact that

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the universe is the same everywhere as anything we know, and a good deal more positive than the rather remote evidence gleaned through the spectroscope.

The famous theory of Arrhenius, the organic chemist who believed meteorites delivered the spores of bacteria—and perhaps all life to Earth—has been discounted rather strongly because of the fact that no bacterial traces are found in present day meteorites. But the objection is based primarily on the fact that the meteors have their shells heated to such a high temperature by passage through the atmosphere that life would be destroyed. This seems to be somewhat specious reasoning because it discounts the size of some meteors whose centers could not possibly be heated by friction in that brief trip through air at high speed. Also it fails to consider that the generalization from limited observation is not necessarily true.

The new organization is consequently considering all these things and is intending to make the study of meteors and meteorites—the only direct visitors from space—a very important and sound one.

## THE DYING SKYSCRAPER . . .

By Jack Winter

**T**WENTY or twenty-five years ago, if you'd have asked anyone, particularly an s-f reader, to describe a city of the future, he would have painted in the most glowing terms a vision of a city of vast towering buildings, interlaced with roadways, "and presenting a vision of lacy loveliness!"

Boy, was he wrong!

The skyscraper is as dead as a dodo. Like some monstrous reptile of the Devonian Age, the skyscraper is headed for extinction. And there are two good reasons for its death. First it is no longer an economical structure. Second, it is an aesthetic monstrosity.

The skyscraper was originally designed from the standpoint of function—this is primarily true in New York though most other large cities have comparable situations. In the downtown areas where land values skyrocketed, the only way to put more offices or dwellings on a piece of land was to build in the only free dimension—up. The result was that the center of the city became a jungle of vast towers probing into the sky, and since there was no general city planning the results cannot be said to be beautiful. The peculiar artistic sense of some of the designers resulted in skyscrapers looking like crude bony fingers jutting into the sky.

But since that time there has been an evaluation of conditions. For one thing the congestion in central portions of cities is so bad that a terrific amount of energy and time is wasted just going from one place to another—the exact opposite of what centralization is supposed to do. The servicing of such buildings is costly and cannot be afforded today. And then there is the general social consciousness that proclaims the skyscrapers to be arrogant monsters without valid reason for being.

With the coming of city planning and a new set of values, cities are taking stock of their conditions. The threat of atomic war with its overwhelming effectiveness against concentrated areas, coupled with the previously mentioned factors of economy and beauty, has made the skyscraper an undesirable. Hardly anywhere in the world are people building toward the sky—instead they are spreading out. Transportation being the wonder it is, distance is no problem at all and cities are becoming vast areas embracing hundreds and hundreds of square miles.

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But at the time he wrote me and at the time I wired him, I wasn't aware that I'd suddenly be left with an office full of work as a sort of souvenir of my associate's trip to Florida. Yet, that's what happened. No sooner did I consent to write than my associate (he's really my boss, but I don't tell anybody that) left town for the Everglades. And I began to sweat it out. The more I sweated, the more I realized what a lousy title I had to use—"The Dead Don't Die".

It just wasn't true. I was dead, dead on my feet and dead on whatever I used for support while writing. And I was not only dead, but constantly dying. Nobody in the world could possibly have felt worse than I did—except your editor, if I'd managed to get my hands on him.

But he's in New York, I'm in Milwaukee, and the story is in FANTASTIC ADVENTURES for you. All I can say is, I hope he's happy in New York, I hope I'm happy in Milwaukee, and I hope you'll be happy with the story.

And if you still insist on an autobiography: I was born in Chicago in 1917, but have lived in Milwaukee for most of what passes for my life. Sold my first yarn when I was 17, and have been writing fantasy ever since: for magazines, books, radio here and abroad. Have also been a political ghostwriter, and for nine years I've been copywriter for an advertising agency. If all this sounds dull to you, then think of poor me, who has to live it yet!

You know, I often think I should get out and around more, if only to provide some fascinating background material for a decent autobiography.

Only trouble is, I don't have time. Too busy writing stories!

—Robert Block



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